

a journey with children
raghubabu

Freedom should be the base for our education! No competitions, no rewards, no punishments are encouraged! Children learn reading and writing from the books. But only through experience, one can understand the real meaning of writings in a book! Learning the text books by-heart and getting through the examinations are not the educational criterial. Children have to observe, experiment, explore and invent new vistas... Learning should be an enjoyable activity and it should be continued throughout the ups and downs of life!!



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...explorations in self and
alternative education

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dedicated to
then children of
Srujana School
&

Mr. M. Sivaram
by whom I grew in
J. Krishna Murthy's
educational thought

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growing in education field

Freedom is creativity.

Where there is creativity there will be discipline.

Freedom should be the base for our education! No competitions, no rewards, no punishments are encouraged! Children learn reading and writing from the books. But only through experience, one can understand the real meaning of writings in a book! Learning the text books by-heart and getting through the examinations are not the educational criteria! And they should not be!! Children have to observe, experiment, explore and invent new vistas... Learning should be an enjoyable activity and it should be continued throughout the ups and downs of life!!

I don't know what discipline is!

Parents demand teachers to teach discipline to their children... May be, in their context discipline means not to speak against the elders, respect elders, not to speak obscenities, lies, etc. But, if we see the reality, the parents themselves drink liquor, abuse with obscenities, beat their wives, and never care about neatness at their homes and around their homes. I know many parents who send their children to bring cigarettes, liquor bottles... I know many fathers



who tell lies on various occasions, when the children are observing... But, these parents expect the school to teach discipline and morality to their children - like not to tell lies, not to smoke, to have good conduct, etc. And moreover they demand to teach discipline through punishments and keeping them in fear!! Really, I don't know! Unless, parents don't change their behaviour towards the children, how can they expect their children to have good conduct... and maintain discipline?

I know only freedom!

Freedom can teach discipline!

Freedom gives a marvellous opportunity to observe things around you, to be alert, to be attentive, to think, to understand the relationships... Many things will be learnt only through freedom... If there is no freedom everything will be suppressed - the thoughts, the emotions, feelings... Certainly, when children come out freely, when they burst out freely, then they will be the architects of the modern world!

Education means 'to draw out'.

Vid of Vidya means 'to know, to experience'.

...What to draw out?

...What to know?

...What to be experienced?

The school should give an opportunity to draw out the children's inner world, i.e. their emotions, their thoughts, their pains, their hidden talents, their hidden psychological characteristics... When they know themselves - then the discipline comes automatically into the life of the children!

Which school is working towards this? All schools, all children, all parents are trapped by the world of competitive examinations! All are in the clutches of competition and are competing with each other without knowing themselves!!

We never tried to divide our children from Nature! How can we separate ourselves from Nature? In fact, Nature is our actual teacher! Nature, the

environment is giving and teaching a lot for us! In return what we have to contribute to the environment? We have to learn from Nature!

I know, it is very difficult to teach "Meditation" to the children, but not impossible! It is the only key 'to know' themselves! 'To draw out' their innermost hidden talents! Meditation is not a sentiment, not belongs to any particular religion or sect! It is Universal! It not only allows us, to draw out our hidden talents, but also teach us to LOVE ourselves and the world around us! We tried our best to give this to our children.

I am not a teacher; I behaved like a brother to the children. Children of our school used to call male teachers as *Anna* (Brother) and female teachers as *Akka* (Sister). We just assisted them to learn themselves. We assisted them to be creative. Every child is an individual, and every individual has its own talents! They have to identify their 'natural' talents, practise them, and become skilful persons!... We just assisted them towards this... Moreover we learned many things from our children, we never hesitated for that and we are very thankful to them for allowing us to learn from them!!!

In my childhood, I was Lord Rama's devotee. As I grew up, I began to frame questions on all affairs of our family. Atheist ideas found their way into my head when I entered my graduation course. Before the completion of it, I came in touch with Revolutionary Writers' Association. But, at all the stages, "meditation" had become an inseparable part of my life. Independent of my religious beliefs, meditation has guided me. At a time, when I was unsure of it, I had come in touch with Jiddu Krishnamurthy's (JK) thoughts and had read his books. They did a world of good to me in choosing my own path.

Even when I was a student, I terribly hated the then prevailing education system - its teaching, its methodology and even the text books. Then itself, I made up my mind to start an alternative school. J. Krishna Murthy's books only strengthened my conviction and had contributed for my later development as a resource person for alternative education.

Whether I was teaching the kids or training the teachers at RDT Teacher Training Center, Yatakal, I failed to explain as to how JK's teachings

inspired my work and how they helped criticise myself to become a tireless experimenter in alternative education. But I can only say the methods I followed and their results.

The experiments at both the schools and in various teacher training sessions were more or less the same. Yet the experiments conducted at Pallipadu school stand for their profundity and depth. I followed the same methodology, i.e. Integrated Teaching scheme, which includes gardening, agriculture work along with singing, dancing, art work with all the freedom for the kids, their noise, petty complaints, etc. at both the schools. But the environment was not the same at the both schools. Because of my inability to document properly the Yatakal School's experiences, I confine myself to the examples of Pallipadu Srujana School.

I had put to practice the JK's thoughts for the children aged below eleven years. If there are any faults in the implementation, I alone am to be blamed.

I am proud to be a product of the worst, dirty, hopeless, hell like devilish Government Telugu medium schools, which are neither enriching our mother tongue nor helping us to understand or to develop skills in other languages such as English or Hindi. I studied in half a dozen schools in different parts of Andhra Pradesh. None of the schools provided me with opportunities to develop my physical, psychological and spiritual planes. Little I learned from these schools. A little only I learned from my parents. But, I learned a lot from my friends; the environment around me; from the libraries; by visiting different places and meeting persons from various walks of life!

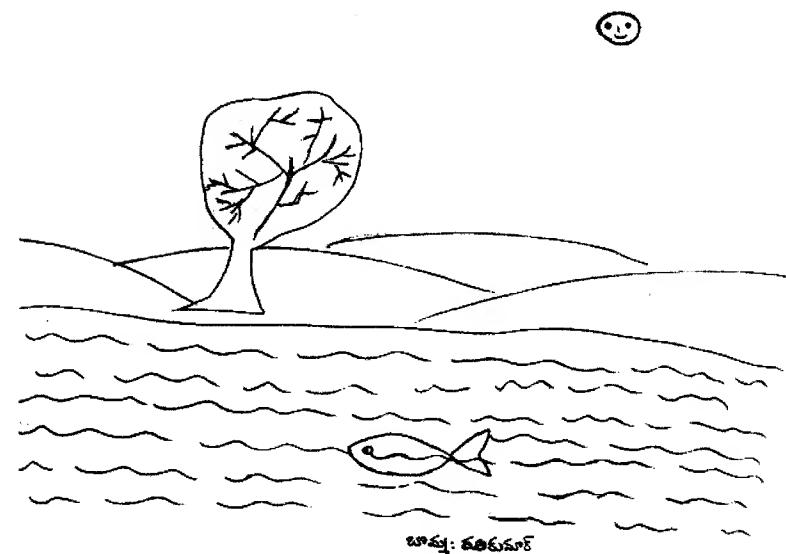
Hence, the language in which I have tried my best to share my ideas and experiences with rest of the world may not be posh. I am thankful to Mr. S. Md. Shareef, Anantapur and Mr. Madhu for their kind, affectionate help and co-operation in correcting this script. I thank Manchi Pustakam team for putting together all the booklets into one and publishing it.

Many essays in this book were published in 'Pathways', and one or two essays were published in 'Teacher Plus'. I am very, very thankful to the

team members of Pathways, a bulletin published by Educational Planning Group, Delhi and to the editor of Teacher Plus, a magazine published from Hyderabad - for their kind encouragement and for giving me an opportunity to share my experiences with the teachers.

I thank the children, staff, founders and other friends of Srujana School, Pallipadu; Paccha Saale (Green School) of Deccan Development Society, Machanur and Chitti Badi, Anantapur for their generous, kind cooperation towards explorations in teaching methodology based on agriculture.

- **raghubabu**



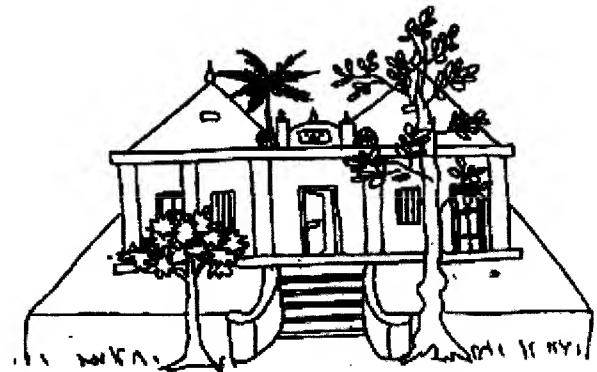
a school under trees

the school should help its young people to discover their vocation and responsibilities...

it should be the soil in which they can grow without fear, happily and integrally.

- J. Krishna Murthy

An Ashram School



Gandhiji started Sabarmathi ashram in North India. A few Gandhians of Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh, desired to start an ashram on the banks of river Pennar. So, they started "Pinakini Satyagraha Ashram" at Pallipadu about 10 Kms from Nellore town, in 12 acres of land. There are Coconut, Mango, Tamarind, Sapota, Casuarina trees on which are dwelling the parrots, owls, mynas, and squirrels with often a large group of visitor cranes. Fields like Brinjals, Groundnut, Ladies finger, Maize, Sesame, Betel leaf crops surround the ashram...

Twice Gandhiji visited this ashram and spent some time here. After independence a few activities were

conducted for some time by the Gandhians. After that some private persons took the ashram for lease. From sixties this ashram was neglected. The land was occupied by the small farmers and the ashram was ruined.

In, 1983 Sri Sivaram and Sri Devkumar, two close friends visited this place and decided to start a school for the poor village children of Pallipadu. Sri Sivaram is a poet and philosopher educationist, likes Jiddu Krishnamurthy's talks very much, and likes to introduce JK's insight into education. Sri Devkumar was the student of Rishi Valley School!

They started rebuilding the ruined ashram and named it "Srujan School". At this stage Mrs. Eleanor Watts, an educationist from England, has joined Sri Sivaram. It was an experimental school, aided by "Action Aid", a funding agency from England, which helps many voluntary organizations, particularly for child education.

They did many educational experiments from 1983 to 1987. They gave some sort of insight to education; gave new creative touches to teaching; integrated various subjects, arts and crafts into education. They invented very simple techniques with the use of locally available waste material! It was a creative school! In 1987, due to different reasons, Mrs. Eleanor Watts left the school. Then I joined the school. For her convenience Mrs. Eleanor made the school as English medium school. I turned it into Telugu medium. I tried my best to follow integrated teaching methods and take care to retain the creative potentialities among the children, which were developed by Sivaram and Eleanor. Along with another teacher Rama, I tried to give a shape to "Agriculture Based Education"! We faced lots of problems from the villagers and from the parents!

The ashram building has our school and our residence also! We used to meditate in the beautiful, quiet nature around us! Meditate while we teach to children in that calm and peaceful nature's lap! Irrespective of success or failure, meditation has its own place in our lives, it leads us to understand the present moments and enjoy whatever we do...

There were no classes in our school, but there were four groups. We named each group with the name of trees, which are in the ashram

campus. The senior children's group is called as "Tamarinds" - this had 9-11 years children who completed four years in the school. The second group is "Coconuts". They completed three years in the school. The third group is "Sapotas", which completed two years. "Mangoes" is the name given to the new entrants. These four groups are divided according to the mental abilities and standards of the children. In this school, there was no system of promoting after completion of a year. We had our own evaluation techniques to assess children's abilities and if they reach the required standard, they will be promoted to the next level! So, every year the groups will be shuffled according to their standards!!

The school never compromised with the existing educational systems. The school was not at all recognized by the present educational system... We feel that the present educational system is suppressing the creative potentials and hindering natural intellectual development among the children and forcing them to by-heart few answers or encouraging them to indulge in mal-practices during the examinations, in order to get the top ranks/ positions unmindful of the content. More than all the above it makes children to be dependent, aggressive and violent citizens. The present education system gives insipid education both for physical and mental development! So, *Srujana School* had its own curriculum - which was linked to Nature; linked to the life; linked to the society; linked to all the difficulties, situations, struggles and clashes children are facing or have to face in future... In a nutshell, it is meant for the overall development of the child.

We cannot separate children from Nature and from the social life!! We are part of Nature and at the same time in the shackles of the society! There were several pressures from the parents, from the politicians of the village and small farmers who occupied the school land. Amidst all these, the school never compromised with anything and more so our system of teaching. This obduracy gave a great strength to us, to be more innovative, more creative, and more sensitive to children...

The School Routine

School starts around 9 A.M. with the assembly activities for about 45 minutes. Every day one activity will be taken up during the assembly sessions: singing; drama; general discussions; reading news papers; listening tape-recorder; etc.

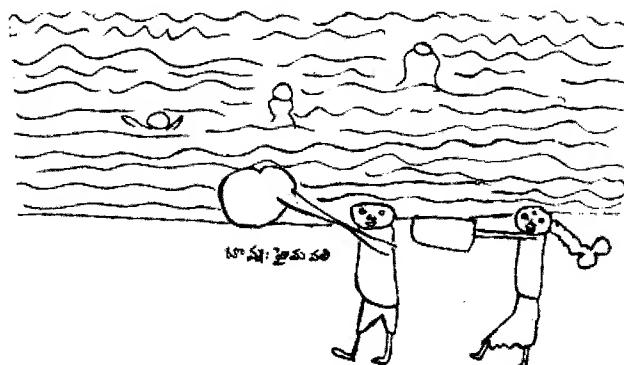
After assembly session, between 9.45 A.M. to 1 P.M. three academic periods were conducted in the morning session. One more academic period was conducted in the afternoon from 2 to 3 P.M., where exercises of different subjects i.e. English, Telugu, Maths, Science were dealt. Senior groups spend one hour per day in "*Self Learning Corners*". Second period of the afternoon session is for arts & crafts! In it they learn painting, clay work, collage, pottery, etc. And then they had to do some manual work like digging pits for tree plantation or for agriculture purpose. After that they had to do garden work for a while! Lastly they play games... Sometimes they used to go to the river Pennar for swimming.

On Saturdays there will be no academic classes. But, we had "*Saturday Seminars*", in which all groups participate and discuss various topics. Some issues relate to them or to their families or to the village, while some are general topics in which the children are interested. Sometimes we may have a small discourse with children on different aspects like superstitions, fear, etc. These seminars prepared children to be conscious about what is happening in their lives and around them. These seminars helped children to develop their intellectual process. Even junior children of "*Sapota*" group like Prabhakar, Chinna Nagaraju, and Ramesh used to participate very actively. After the seminar they used to read library books for one hour and then go home. This was the time for teachers to review the week's work and plan for the oncoming week, prepare teaching aids and work cards. Now and then we had sightseeing visits to the fields, nearby villages, fairs, etc.

We Caught the Sea in Our Poems

*"Like a half rupee coin
Sprouted in the sky
The moon has grown over the sea!
Waves are flying
To catch and kiss the moon!
Like the rice, boiling and over flowing,
Like heaps of salt, like kids competing to run first,
The waves are running towards the shore!"*

- Jaya, 11 years, Tamarind group



Around 6 O'clock in the evening the moon was seen as if rising from the ocean. Jaya sat beside me. She was watching the raising moon in a meditative mood! And while watching she was reciting poetry. I too was watching the raising moon and jotting down at full speed whatever Jaya says! Jaya's poetry too is growing like the boundless ocean, like an epic! She was telling each sentence in meditation. She was collecting metaphors and telling. Jaya's poetry is running like the waves of the ocean:

*"Oh! Ocean!
How pride of grace you are*

*You drag everything into you
Like a demon!
O! Moon!
However you think to fall into the water?
You can't
The waves make you disperse...."*

Her poetry was of three full pages. She said. "There we stop," and she ran into the sea to play...

A few teachers from two voluntary organizations visited our school to learn modern teaching methods! Particularly reading and writing methods. They stayed at the school for a month. One fine full-moon day the school children and these teacher trainees went to Mypadu beach for swimming. In the past the children went to the sea 2, 3 times. But, still it looks new to them. They were surprised at its waves and its vastness...

Boys undressed and ran into the sea. They were totally nude! Girls ran with their clothes on. Small children were fearful to go deep. But the elder children were playing with the waves. The big waves were taking up their tender bodies to a height and suddenly dropping them down. If the children stand opposite to the waves they get swept. The waves sweep away the sand beneath the legs and make them fall! It is a funny game with the water...

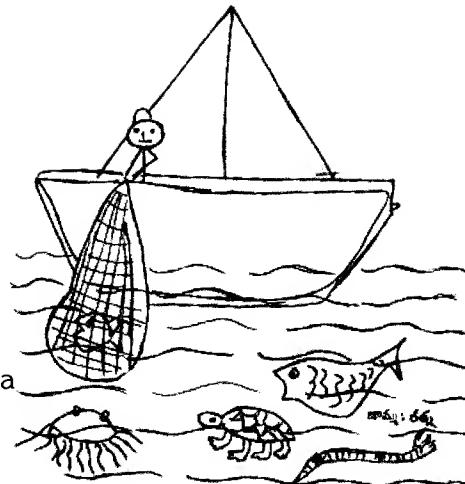
There were no boundaries for joy and happiness. Elder children like Jungli were swimming deep into the sea. Everybody was happy. The sea also happily taught lessons to the children very interestingly.

Ramesh, a seven years old boy put forth his experiences this way:

*"Waves have beaten with speed
Children from each other dispersed
Moon thought:
'Why these children are dying?'
So he is catching everyone
— Moon wishes to give light
To this dancing children...."*

Prabhakar questioned the sea:

“Where are you born?
Sea!
Good shells and fishes
are
Inside you
O Sea!
Why you rise up?”



Chinna Nagaraju of Sapota group prays to the sea:

“Ocean! You are
swallowing and beating us
Moon! You are like a golden disc
When your rays touch the sea
Up and down with roar...
Like a silver gold tiger you fall on us
Ocean! Can’t you take me into the middle of the ocean?
Can’t you show everything?
Can’t you show entire sea?
How far are the Fishes, Shells, and Waves... everything...?
Ocean! Let me sit on your waves...”

Whatever it is - we have to feel it intensely. Subject and object have to merge together and they should not be separated. It is one; it is unique; from the moments of ecstasy the creative work should begin! When children are taken into such moments that is the right education!

Pedda Nagaraju, of Tamarind group, questions himself whenever he visits the sea; with curiosity he questions the sea too:

“When waves see the moon
Then they roar like a lion
They see a human being...
Ocean! When the water in you dry up?”

I am asking same question
Whenever I come?”

And here is Narayana from Coconut group:

“Ocean! You help the beggars a lot
If you give shells to them
They give them to the people
The people give food to them
The beggars eat it
And remember you forever...”



Narayana is a rough and mischievous boy in the school. But, now his heart responds with lots of compassion! Education should draw these sensitive and delicate gentle moments among even the rough and tough children - then only it will be called as “right education”. The significance of education is to draw out the innermost humanistic qualities and make children as worthy “individuals”.

The sea at Mypadu gave such an opportunity to our children to bring their latent feelings and share them with all. How one can teach creative methods of teaching to these teacher trainees, if they are not aware of creative moments! Can anybody expect the text books (which are prescribed all over the state) to help children to bring out their innermost poetic expression? Not at all!

Mother Earth

Telugu class started in the shade of the tamarind tree! Mastan lay down on the small writing table, but was intently listening to the story. Mallikarjuna, Jungli and Nagaraju sat on the writing tables. Jaya rested her body over my legs and was peeping into the book, which I was holding. Other children sat in front of the tables on the ground and were listening to the story.

For three days I was narrating the story "Mother Earth", a novel written by a soviet writer Mr. Chingiz Aitmatov.

Mastan, with a stick in his hand was pricking the children in front of him. Mallikarjuna was also pricking the girls with a ball pen tip. Occasionally they lodged complaints against the wrong doers. And sometimes they shout at Mastan "Mastan O! Short calf!" In spite of such quarrels and mischief, I was trying to narrate the story interestingly. Quarrelling is children's nature! One way it is their right! If they don't quarrel, who will? How can we stop them in the name of "discipline" or anything else? In my class children may lie down or sit on the writing tables, or do something mischievous; but all the time they listen to the story very attentively. That is what is actually required.

The common definition to the word "attention" is children with folded hands, keeping silence and not questioning the teacher, gazing at the teacher without moving the eyes and sitting quietly in the classroom. They are also considered as "attentive!" But, in fact they just watch the lip movement of the teacher, but their mind may be away!

I suddenly stopped the story and questioned Mallikarjuna "With whom Tolganoi is speaking? And why is she speaking?"

Mallikarjuna didn't flinch a little but was very quick to answer and correctly too! On one side he is pricking the girls, laughing at them and disturbing the class, but when did he "listen?" And how he answered?

Children cannot sit quietly! Something or other they do - whether it is meaningful or not, whether it is painful to others or not, but, their senses

work fantastically... I never warned them in the name of discipline, but, smoothly suggested them; tried to make them understand the pain if they do mischievous things.

For about half an hour I narrated the story, and suddenly I kneeled down, took a handful of soil, showed it to all children, and asked them, "If you all love this mother earth, write some poems..."

Mallikarjuna walked away with his note book and sat on the top of the pump shed. Two more children followed him. Jaya and Sudhir ran and sat on the school veranda. A few lied down on the grass. Ravi and Vijaya sat under the tamarind tree, in front of the tables and started writing. After twenty minutes all children came to me running with loud and happy shouts! All gathered under the tree again. Everybody sat in front of their tables and started reciting their poems...

Anuradha read her piece first, with glittering eyes:

*"Mother Earth!
You promoted the civilization!
At first men didn't know building houses
You found the innocents who know nothing
You nurtured their civilization....
In our childhood we played on you...
We played with clay on our heads and teased each other
O! Mother Earth! Really you are like our mother..."*

Ravi was a deaf boy. He wanted to read. But, everybody tried to read at the same time. So, strong children like Anuradha, Mastan, Jaya got the opportunity first and Ravi in the end. Mastan started his poem:

*"Mother!
I crawled in the dust and played
And bathed in your hands
Again I ran into the dust as nude."*

Then Vijaya read her poem:

*Mother Earth!
This farm
Hide the seeds in your lap
After sprouting it will be
Green and beautiful...
We feel like a festival....*

Mallikarjuna wanted to complete his recitation as early as possible, so that he can go outside and play! So he started reading with full speed and in loud voice:

*I born in you
I grew in you
I merge in you
How grateful you are!
You give your essence to us
Mother! Take all of us with you
We cannot bear all these turmoils....*

We really do not know from which sources the children respond. Everyone has his own experiences! Mallikarjuna who teases the girls in the classroom, did he write a poem like this? He does not want to enjoy the turmoils...

How many turmoil's, pains and tears are hidden in the innocent minds of these children! They are afraid of their parents! How much their parents are troubling them? What are the influences of the surroundings on the children? With whom these children can share their difficulties?

At the time, Ravi got his opportunity. Nobody was in the class i.e. under the tree to hear his poem! All are away, playing. But, I was there to listen to Ravi's poem...

*We build the houses on your head
We travel on you
Trees, dogs, and all other animals born*

*In your lap
The burdens are falling on you!
Mother, on you
The towns, countries are developing...*

How can we teach "patriotism" to our children? Every day we ask children to sing national anthem and take the pledge, but, do they become "patriots" by simply reciting these national anthems and pledges? They stand in attention and salute the national flag, but do they become "patriots"? Do they learn social responsibility? Children do not know about "love", "dedication", "patriotism" ... Children do sing, play, quarrel, mischief, fight, tease... Teacher has to understand this natural characteristic of the children and start planning his programme accordingly!

Above poems amply prove that child can take anything onto their intense feeling and express through it. Children may quarrel, be mischievous, but if there is right education, they never forget their duties... This is the task before the parents and the teachers... How can we let our children feel to recognize their duties and responsibilities?

A Tamarind Tree

Tamarind trees are in full blossom. These tamarinds have special taste - sweet and sour!! These are huge and old trees. Children cannot climb. But they want to taste the fruits. They were all throwing stones onto the single, innocent tree. Unmindful of the vast shadow it casts for us to relax and its multifarious service by way of useful contributions to our needs, all the children are throwing stones at the tree.

Children want to eat something! If any food is at hand, they will not afford to lose it. Those who know climbing the tree are very selfish, they get enough fruits for themselves, but are not too generous to their friends. Whatever they collected, they give one or two fruits to those who are very close to them! And they will not bother about others...

Children like Jungli and Vijaya were somewhat different. When they climb the tree, first they get enough fruits for themselves, and later they pluck the fruits and throw them down for others. The children standing under the tree fumble with each other to get those fruits. Sometimes they quarrel to get a fruit! Those who don't get, plead to children who were successful in getting the fruits.

But, children like Sudhir, who are mild, neither know how to climb the tree, nor fight or beg to get fruits - only wait in the wings for somebody to come and help in this regard. Sudhir's close friend Nagaraj knows it very well, when he got more fruits, he gives a few to Sudhir!

The general psychology of children is quite different. No matter whether they eat or not, they want to collect more! They give a piece to those whom they like! Otherwise they don't give even a single fruit to others! They feel proud to grab as many as they can. They feel quite superior and actually look down on others. They tease others and won't part with their "treasure". In spite of receiving bad treatment, the tree never complains but continues to shower its generosity on mankind!

I ran there and shouted at the children to stop throwing stones at the tree. I asked them who can climb the tree, so that they get a few fruits and distribute equally to all school children. Under my supervision they did it, but, when I was away those selfish children who know climbing, repeated the same story!!

Several times, I and other teachers motivated the children not to throw stones onto the trees, but to pray the trees for giving fruits and to bow to the tree whenever they climb and pluck the fruits, then get fruits for entire school children and distribute equally among themselves. But, children never understand this concept! Whenever I say that trees also have "Life", they just listen and in practice they behave very cruelly... We tried our best to make them sensitive towards all beings, particularly to trees... but they didn't keep their promise!

What to do??

How can I make my children sensitive, alert, aware of all living beings? How can I teach them to change their attitudes and develop compassion, kindness towards all beings, nature, to whole universe? How can I make them understand the bad effects of quarrels, selfishness and how can I give an insight of love?

Telling stories, singing songs had no effect!

Telling morals too did not prove to be efficacious!

Discussions too didn't help!

Disciplinary actions too did not change the situation!

What to do...??

What is Discipline?

"What is this sir? Is it a class?" Jaya's father was surprised and a little angry about the class under the tamarind tree. He warned the children, "Children! Sit straight and listen to the lesson attentively ..." and went away to his fields. I just smiled at him, turned towards the children and asked them.

"So, you say Shankranthi is farmer's festival. O.K. How?"

"It is because...."

Jaya pulled my leg.

Narayana got up and ran towards me and pulled my shoulders.

Vijaya raised her hands and shouted, bent on answering first.

Mallikarjuna stood up and bent on to the children to give the answer with eagerness.

Malli started requesting me to give the first chance to her.

Sudhir just sat before his writing table with a smile.

Every child is anxious to give a reply. Because of this anxiety, eagerness it does not look like a class - every time this conversation method creates

a big noise - a noise like in a village fair! Though the children may try mischief, they will all be involved in the conversation. Children like Sudhir who have no much intimacy with others, also cannot sit quietly. I like to involve every one by asking for their opinions. For this I have to tolerate the rudeness of the children - one pulls my shoulder, another pulls my legs, someone scratches my knees - these are rural children!

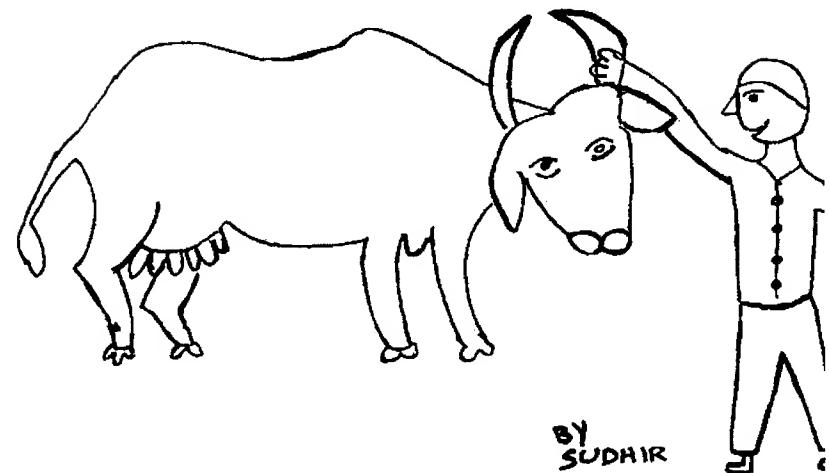
Every child knows the answer based on their own family background and their surroundings and each one has their own answers! Everyone has his rich experience!! But, they get confused when they put their experiences into words! And moreover there is an eagerness to say something! They do not want to express by a realistic and logical answer, but, are eager to say whatever strikes them...

That was the base for my method of teaching... I am like a brother to the children, not a teacher - to read the lesson, explain the meanings, opposite words etc, and ask them to memorise questions and answers! First I gather what children know, then I put them in an order, and from these known things I will lead the journey towards "Unknown", both logically and philosophically. I feel it is the right way of education!

When I start the class under the tamarind tree or in a classroom, I throw several doubts to them - then the noise starts. Certainly they quarrel, but they slip into the process of thinking. Everybody wishes to contribute something! Malli thinks very slowly and she responds later. We cannot force her to contribute immediately! Sometimes she would come back to the school in the evening and give the answer. Sometimes they will start the next day with their observations...

This method is really a disturbance to the other classes. Other teachers may feel bad with the noise! They may get angry with this undisciplined class - like Jaya's father!! But what to do?? I feel that this is the way in which they are really learning to think, getting real "education".

Integrated Teaching Method: Shankranthi Project



In January 1988, our school took up a project around the festival of *Shankranthi*. It is a peasants' festival; a villagers' festival; children's festival! Children have rich experiences associated with it and the teachers wished to explore these, thereby providing the students with opportunities to learn various subjects, including art and craft.

The project lasted for a week or ten days and we wanted to ensure that when the children enter the school they should find an atmosphere of *Shankranthi* everywhere. All activities and subjects were to be related and integrated with this. The intention was to create an environment in which the children would be in a creative mood, creating both as individuals and in a group, at times concentrating all their energies to work together as a team. The teachers would function as helpers, in drawing out their talents, to bring out their inner feelings and their world.

After two days of discussions our teaching plan was ready. An outline is given below:

1. Telugu & English Subjects: Reading and writing poetry relating to *Shankranthi*; symbols; songs and actions of *Gangireddulu* (decorated oxen), *Haridasas*, *Budabukkalavallu*, etc. First day *Bhogipallu*; second day *Shankranthi* festival celebrations; third day *Kanuma* festival; *Rangolies*; cock fighting; cooking porridge with new rice; superstitions during the festival, etc.

2. Science Subject: Sun, planets; is the Earth rotating around the Sun, or is the Sun rotating around the Earth? Zodiac; how Sun enters into the zodiac sign of Capricorn?

3. Social Studies Subject: Calendar; crops; seasons...

4. Mathematics Subject: Area; shapes; patterns; symmetry; divisions; income and expenditure...

5. Craft Class: Decorate the school yard with *rangolies*; paper cuttings etc.,

6. Painting Class: Mixing of colours; drawing and painting of *Bhogi* fire; pictures of *Gangireddulavallu*; *Gobbi* dance; games with cocks; *Bhogi* bath; white washing the houses; cooking porridge with new rice; worshipping the cattle; etc.

7. Assembly Classes: Acting like a family celebrating the festival; mono-acting of *Gangireddulavallu*, *Budabukkalavallu*, *Yanadivallu*, etc. and *Gobbi* dances....

Green Shankranthi Came Once Again by Weeping

"Very good! You said many things about *Shankranthi*. I learned a lot from you. Now it is the time for creation. Before we write something I would like to read few poems..." I said.

Immediately Narayana loudly started to sing a poem from a Telugu drama! I stopped him with a smile and read a few poems from epics. The

children did not like them! Then I asked children, "Never mind, if you do not like them. Can you write poems like this?"

Everybody went into a pensive mood. Vijaya, Ravi, Malli, Mallikarjuna sat quietly with closed eyes for some time, then began to weave their ideas into words.

Jungli of *Tamarind* group brought his poem:

*"It has come! It has come!
Shankranthi festival has come!
It came to spend money!
Money it spent on
The rice
On preparing sweets...
No paisa is left in their hands!
But, again they enjoyed chicken curry!!"*

Jungli sees everything from a point of economics, he reflects poverty and his difficulties...

Kristayya always thinks in negative way:

*"Green Shankranthi came by weeping
When we are preparing sweets it came by weeping
Shankranthi ate all of our sweets
Along with this weeping Green Shankranthi
The fog also came!
Then we lit *Bhogi* fire
Because the weeping Shankranthi brought the fog."*

Narayana wrote a small conversation:

I: *Wake up brother-in-law! Mother asked to wake up and lit the *Bhogi* fire.*
Brother-in-law: *Wait! The Sun has not risen.*
I: *Wake up! Otherwise mother will beat you.*
Brother-in-law: *Wait!*

(Brother-in-law again slipped into the sleep and did not wake up.)

I: *Mother! Brother-in-law didn't wake up. Bring some water...*

Mother: *Water! Why?*

I: *Bring, I will tell you later*

Mother brought the water. I sprayed water on the face of brother-in-law. He stirred... Sister laughed aloud! Brother-in-law ran behind the wall and hid himself...

Many issues are there in life. Everybody has their own background. Based on this they will respond. The school is a place to afford such opportunities to respond! Who will teach language? Who will teach literature? Children also are knowledgeable persons. They know everything! If the school gives proper opportunities to respond, then they will become great artists, great scientists, etc. Certainly! Are we creating such opportunities for our children?

A Conversation on Shankranthi

Birds were making noise on tamarind trees. Squirrels chased each other from top of the tree to the ground, from ground to the tree and were enjoying themselves... The children gathered under the tamarind tree and started a conversation...

I: So, your sisters, brother-in-laws and your relatives who live in other villages, will come to your home for the festival. O.K. But, tell me what is a festival? What does it mean?

Children: We all gather, meet each other...

I: Then.

Children: We white wash our house.

- Smear the house with colours and put *rangolies* inside and outside the house.

- Worship the cattle.

- Prepare sweets.

- Wear new clothes.

I agree to all that, but, I want to know what is a festival?

We will all be cheerful, happy and together we play games.

What is cheerfulness?

.... ??

O.K. When you will be cheerful?

When we enjoy ourselves, when we are happy...

So, if you are happy, you will be cheerful. If you are happy you can play, sing... Will you be happy if you are alone or will you be happy if you are with a group?

We will be happy as a group.

Why? Why don't you get happiness if you are alone?

If I am alone, there will be none to converse with; no one to play with and we will be bored!

If so, go and sleep when you are bored.

How much can we sleep?

Then, be free, don't do anything.

How can it be! If we speak with others we will be happy. Is it good for us to be alone without speaking to others?

So, if you are with others, you will be happy! O.K. Not only you and your few relatives, if entire village is with full of happiness, wearing new clothes, eating sweets... then...

Children: Then it is a festival...

I: Festival means?

Children: All will be happy...

I: A festival means, not only one person or a few persons, but the whole village and entire country should feel happy and live happily... Then it becomes a festival... Mallikarjuna, how do your family members celebrate festivals?

Mallikarjuna: What festival?

I: Any festival, for example take *Shankranthi*...

Mallikarjuna: We celebrate it for three days. The first day we wake up early in the morning, lit the *Bhogi* fire, boil *Tegas* (edible root of germinating Palmyra tree), and thus we get warmth from the cold.

I: How is the *Bhogi* fire?

Children: The fire touches the sky, it is red.

I: After the *Bhogi* fire what do you do?

Children: We have an oil-bath.

I: How is that oil-bath?

Children: We have head-bath with soapnuts.

I: Why do you have an head-bath with soapnuts? Why can't you use other material?

Children: Because it will remove the oil and cleanse the hair.

I: What happens if the dust, oil remains in the hair?

Children: We will get head-ache.

I: What happens if you get head-ache?

Children: If we get any ache, it will not be good for our health.

I: After the bath what will you do?

Children: After the bath, mother will give us new clothes. We wear them, meet our friends, greet them and play...

The conversation will go on like this... There will be no beginning or end! There is no hesitation from either side. Children are eager to exchange their views and talk about what they know and whatever they celebrate at home. The only thing is that the teacher has to be patient and conduct an appropriate dialogue with the children. Otherwise, they get bored. There are no text books. No lessons. No teaching. No definitions to explain and nothing for the children to memorise! *The experiences of the children are our text books*. They can think. They can come to conclusions; they can invent definitions and they are happy to announce whatever definition they have found... They know many things!

A one way lecture method makes children dull and disinterested! But this type of conversation will help and allow all children to think and respond! They can identify, discover and find unknown things - but still children make noise, quarrel and get up to mischief, all under the tamarind tree - because it is an open place, not a class room! They have several material around them like sticks, stones and soil to tease other children. Sometimes they chase the squirrels, drive away the birds, and watch the surroundings for an interesting thing... In the class room within the walls they cannot get such materials...



Mathematics in Shankranthi

“During the festival your mother must have prepared sweets. What material is required to prepare sweets?” Rama asked the children in her maths class.

Vijaya informed, “One kilogram of rice, a quarter kilogram of jaggery and half a kilogram of oil, etc.”

“How much did you spend to get this material?”

The children listed the expenses:

One Kg rice	=	Rs. 2.00
Quarter Kg jaggery	=	Rs. 2.00
Half Kg Oil	=	Rs. 12.00
Total	=	Rs. 16.00

In Vijaya’s house they spend Rs. 16/- towards preparing milk-porridge. But, they prepared two or three varieties too. Every child listed out what sweets their mothers had prepared, what material they used and how much they spent on that material!

“How many dots are required for a peacock *rangoli*?” Rama asked the girls. And she continued, “How much area it will occupy? Did you draw it in two feet area or in four feet area?”

Rama divided and marked four feet squares in the front yard of the school. Children decorated the front yard with beautiful *rangoli* patterns. They decorated with colour powders also!

Dots required for each *rangoli* design; squares in a design; shapes of the designs; the area each design occupied; the quantity of coloured powders they applied; etc., all these things they learned practically.

Observe the regular mathematics text books: how many theories and definitions the writers of text books pour out for the primary children. In class three, the text book imposes hard Sanskritised technical terms on 8-9 year old tender minds, such as: *Sankhyamana*; *Sangnamana*;

Sankalanam; *Vyavakalanam*; *Ekankasankhya*; *Viyogakam*; *Viyogyam*; *Sesham*; *Sahaja viluva* (Natural value); *Sthana viluva* (Place value)...

Is it necessary to impose so many of these unknown, indigestible technical terms in the primary stages? Isn’t there other way to prepare textbooks for primary classes in simple language without any complicated term? Isn’t there any way to create interest in mathematics? Unless the teacher is aware of children’s environment, it is really difficult to teach and make the children understand what is being taught!

No mathematics chapter will take the children into the realm of their own life styles and environment. Very dull, boring and uninteresting maths...! Moreover, it creates fear among the children! To get through examinations children have to memorise the theorems and the terms. The maths exam is the Waterloo of many a child. As many as 70% of the students fail in maths. And then in English paper, which is taught as second language!

But, Rama made mathematics easy. She has taken it into their experiences, taken it into their homes, into their routine activities and provided them an opportunity to learn mathematics very simply, without memorising the definitions and terms. Maths is also a part of their daily activities like language! Realizing this is really a great experience!

Children Became Planets for a While

If you turn the pages of Language (Telugu) text book you find the following:

“...During the Shankranthi day the Sun will enter into the Zodiac sign of crocodile...”

If you turn the pages of social studies text book of the same class you will find:

“...The Sun and stars do not move. The Earth and other planets rotate around the Sun...”

Certainly the language teachers are so traditional and ritualistic that they still consider that the Sun and the Moon are planets! Do they know that the Uranus and the Neptune are the 8th and 9th planets in our solar system? They still teach that Rahu and Kethu are planets mentioned by myths! Still they teach that the solar eclipse will occur because the Rahu swallows the Sun during that day! The language text books support this concept.

Don't you find the confusion between language, social studies and science text books? Don't you find how unscientific and unrealistic our text books are? And more over there is no co-ordination in writing language and science text books and between school teachers while they teach! They teach according to their text books to complete the syllabus! And students have to by-heart these lessons to pass examinations. Don't you feel how our children are growing with most unscientific, unrealistic and confusing thoughts!

I have asked 12 children to stand in a circle. One boy stood in the centre of the circle. One girl was rotating around that boy in the centre. That boy is the Sun. The rotating girl is the Earth. The 12 boys in the circle are the 12 zodiac signs! I drew the same picture on the black-board.

Suddenly I asked the Earth to stop somewhere. Earth stopped. I asked: "Vijaya! Do you see Mastan? Where is he?"

Vijaya answered, "Mastan is in front of Jaya."

"So, if Mastan is the Sun and Jaya is the zodiac sign of Virgin, how he seems to be?"

Vijaya again replied, "The Sun is in front of the zodiac sign of Virgin..."

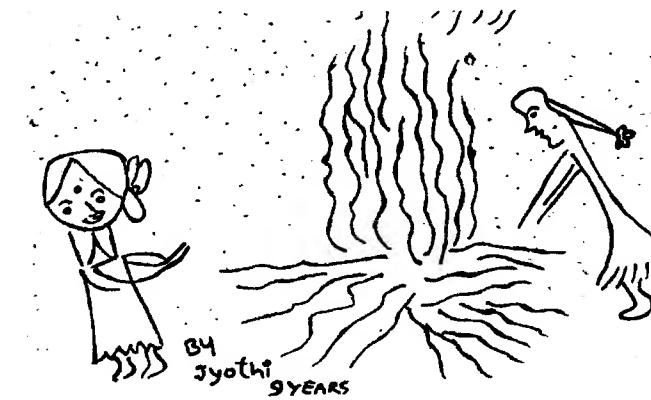
Again the Earth started rotating around the Sun. She stopped here and there and observed the position of the Sun. In this game the Sun and the zodiac signs are not moving, only the Earth is rotating...

"Earth! Now how you see the Sun?"

"He is in the zodiac sign of the crocodile..."

"So, due to the Earth's rotations, we feel that the Sun enters into the different zodiac signs and travels through them over a period of a month! That is why we feel that the Sun enters into the zodiac sign of crocodile on the Shankranthi day..."

Children became the planets and zodiac signs for a while! They experienced the complexity and the variety of the Universal movement of the galaxy!

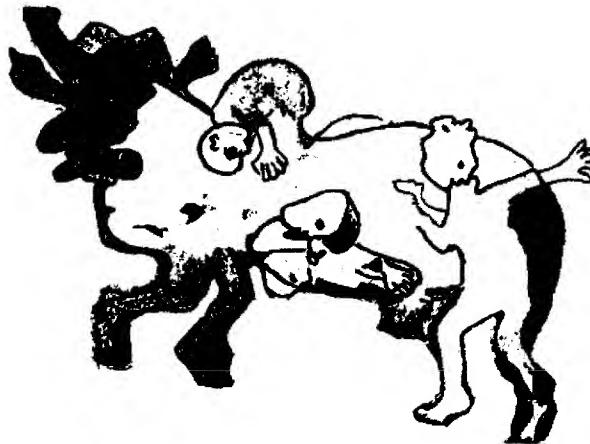


Children's Drawings are the Base for Modern Art

"See the hump of the cow - isn't it like an unborn baby?" Mani explains to his mother of a painting, which was collectively drawn by the children.

"These are the legs I have drawn," Mallikarjuna explained to his father. The body and the head are not on those legs. Those are merged into the stomach of that huge cow...

This huge cow was collectively painted by the children. They sat on all sides of a 3x2 meter chart! They had all drawn pictures of children standing, sitting and walking viewed from all directions. At the end, two young British artists, who visited the school during Shankranthi, Mr. Luis Cook and Mr. Daniel Saul joined all these children's pictures



together and gave the whole composition an outline. Then it looked like a huge cow! One child's head became the hump of the cow! One standing child's legs became the rear legs of the cow which were drawn by Mallikarjuna! Another's hands became forelimbs! And one's fingers became the udder! In this big painting of the cow we saw children standing, sitting, and sleeping! It is a collective effort!

There were other paintings also - children taking bath on *Bhogi* day; girls decorating the front yard of the houses with *rangolies*; *Gangireddula* persons (men with decorated oxen); beggars; men decorating the horns of the bulls; white-washing houses; preparing sweets; *Gobbi* dance; giving milk-porridge to crows; cock-fightings; cooking milk-porridge; worshipping the cattle etc. Paintings drawn by the children were exhibited in the school after the project was completed! Parents were invited to see the paintings and children explained their works to their parents. More than 30 art pieces surprised the parents!

In daily assembly classes children were singing *Shankranthi* songs; reading poetry; telling stories; acting and playing out dramas. During academic classes, the teaching was concentrated around *Shankranthi*. In Telugu and English language classes children were writing poems and essays. In Science classes children were learning about planets, zodiac signs etc. In mathematics classes they solved problems based on *Shankranthi*

activities... Everywhere there was an atmosphere of *Shankranthi*! In this creative atmosphere children worked hard for a week to produce marvellous art pieces around *Shankranthi*! They did not imitate famous artists or copy from others. Neither the British artists nor the school teachers helped them to draw pictures, mixing colours... No instructions, no suggestions were given to the children!

Every child is an artist in himself! Everybody drew painting from their own imagination. They drew whatever they liked in their own style! A few painted by leaping on the chart; a few lay on their stomachs and painted; a few sat with crossed legs and painted very patiently; a few children like Ramesh, Prabhakar had the paint on their faces and on their legs; a few got the paint on their shirts and bodies; children like Abdullah and Narayana daubed the paint on the neighbouring children and laughed! Children formed teams and started to paint. Vijaya by nature was an artist. She did not allow Sudhir to join her; she really was afraid that Sudhir may spoil her work, so she sat alone. Every child had a limited space to paint, the given space was not sufficient for Hemalatha, so, she encroached into the others space; the neighbouring artist Mallikarjuna objected to this invasion by her!

At last, the children produced wonderful and rare art pieces! There was no rule, no rhyme and no symmetry. Every object, every sound, every idea flowed fluently out of their imagination! Their skill was raw, yet lovely.

Parents normally tend to think that children get spoiled if not checked and kept under vigil all the time and at every point. But they fail to understand that by doing so they are trespassing into the child's world, nipping in the bud their creativity, imagination and even self-confidence! Naturally, children are creative! Education is a means to draw out their latent talents and help them to grow in stature, to equip themselves with latest knowledge.

Pablo Picasso said, "It had taken me a life time to learn to draw like a child."

Children's drawings are base for modern art! The two British artists worked with children for a week, to elicit creative paintings from them! They were tired after working three hours with them every day! In contrast the children never got tired of painting! Louis burst out without hesitation... "We are getting tired working for three hours only with the children. You and your staff spend whole day with children and you bear with their mischief and quarrels - don't you feel tired?"

Teaching is not an occupation! It is also a creative job!

How many of us get the opportunity to spend time with the children?

How many of us assist the children in their endeavour to reach the heights of creativity and all round development?

Can Obscenities be Used?!

School has not yet started. Children who came early were playing different games. Some were plucking the tamarind leaves. Some children went into the garden to examine the plant growth! And two children were writing the day's news on the black-board from a Telugu news paper. I sat on the steps, observing the children.

Boys were playing a game called "billamgodu" (a stick game), got a dispute and started quarrelling with each other. Mastan was abusing young Prabhakar by calling Prabhakar's caste... "You! Washer man..."

Prabhakar too was not a mild boy; he too retorted by calling Mastan's caste "You! Cotton cleaner..."

Pedda Nagaraju wanted to interfere, but other children did not heed to his requests and abused Pedda Nagaraju by calling his caste, "You! Weaver... Why do you interfere?" Nagaraju withdrew from the scene.

Just then, Saila's father came to me. He over-heard those obscenities and abused the children, "Are you studying in the school? Don't call anybody by caste and religion..." He came to me, sat beside me on the steps and made a complaint, "See, we send children to your school for

learning good, cultured language and good behaviour! At homes we use slang. Frankly speaking, it is not good. Children should get afraid of you! If there is no fear of the teacher, children will not learn anything and they will be spoiled!" He complained from his own traditional background of education.

I smiled and said, "Yes it is true! Still I could not come to a conclusion, whether scoldings can be used or not?! Can anyone express their anger by way of using slang? If a teacher wants to scold or reprimand a child, can he use obscene language? I am sorry! At present I cannot teach any moral science to my children. They have to analyze the nature of anger, the situation, and the psychology behind anger and correct themselves... It should be understood through freedom only! If you guide them, start to correct them, not to use slang... they cannot express their anger freely and understand the nature of emotions..."

I do not know how far Saila's father understood my words! But he stood on his argument very strongly!

The school started! Assembly began! Children sat in a big circle. Myself and Rama also sat among the children. All sang a group song. After a while of silence, I started a short discussion with the children.

"Listen, now I am bringing an important issue before you. You have to think about it, understand pros & cons of it, then come to a conclusion. The issue is..." I paused for a while and continued, "In our school you are abusing each other by calling your castes and religions like "You, washer man", "You, weaver", "You, cotton cleaner." Tell me, is it good to abuse each other like that? Think... Is it good?"

All were silent. A few bent down their heads. A few started to scribble on the floor with their fingers...

Jaya normally uses slang's more than any other in the school... She slowly said "It has become a habit!"

I said, "Another issue is also here. You are not only abusing each other but even abusing your mother and sisters also by using such a filthy

words like 'Lanjakoduka' (You, son of a bitch)..., etc. I heard many times. Have you ever thought about these slang's? Are you just following your elders, because they are using slang. Please think over once, how bad and nasty to do so to your own parents, kith & kin. You must learn how to respect each other, but not to abuse. You should learn good manners and then only you will come up in life."

When I coined obscenities in my talk, children laughed...

Ramesh of Sapota group emotionally answered, "Yes! Because we shouldn't abuse each other by calling caste! Castes are created according to our work! So..."

Jaya cried, "Why all the men use slang on the women...?"

I tried to convince her, through classifying the school children into their religions and castes. On that day, children came to a conclusion not to abuse each other by the name of religion, caste, and women. But there are some children who promised, but, do not know how to keep their promise...

Really they want to keep their promise, but, during the night liquor flows all over the streets of their colony and reverberates with obscenities! Men drink, abuse, beat their wives by using obscenities! All the streets are filled with dirt, drainage canals with pigs, donkeys and dogs! How my children can keep their promise amidst all these adverse conditions...!?

River Pennar too is Our Teacher

Children were walking along the river bed. I found a few plants like turmeric in the sand. I asked very innocently, "Who has thrown the turmeric here? See, this turmeric is very small..." I took them into my hands and observed. Children laughed at me and said, "These are not turmeric! They look like that - you just press them and see."

I pressed one of them. It burst like a balloon. Children explained to me, "These are the roots of water plants! These have medicinal value also.

If you get stomach-ache or dysentery get the powder of these roots, mix them in water and drink..."

"So, these roots are used as medicine..."

"Anna! Anna! See these plants under water. The leaves are like ribbons..." Children dragged me into the river.

Vallisneria plants are shaking their heads under the water. "As botany students, we call these plants as Vallisneria. What do you call these plants in your village?" I asked them. But they do not know.

I strained the water. Children too gathered around me, "Have you ever observed these plants. Do you know that they are also divided into male and female plants..." Children were surprised and tried to pluck out those plants.

"Don't pluck them. First see their character. See the flowers of the male plants separated from the plants and floating on the water. But the flowers of the female plants remain to their stalk. Observer the stalk - how is it? It is like a spring, do you know why it is like that?"

Children do not know pollination, fertilisation etc. I explained them about it there itself. And again children started walking in the water. I have shown another type of plant... "These are Hydrilla plants. We can do many experiments with it." Children come to this river daily. They swim very often. Vijaya, Chinna Nagaraju are children of washer men, so they wash clothes in the river. But these plants did not attract their attention.

Boys removed their clothes, entered the river and started swimming. The girls entered the river with their clothes on. They made lot of nuisance there - chasing each other; fighting; competing how far they can swim; few dived into the water and pulled legs of the other children; the fish in the water kissed their bodies and the boys screamed; small children who do not know swimming felt suffocated and cried...

Water and sand open the doors of the children's imaginative world. They built small castles in the sand and decorated with flowers, leaves. They drew pictures in the sand; they buried their legs up to the knee

and tried to pull them out - but they couldn't! They played games like Kabaddi and Kho-kho in the sand.

Children collected lots of shells and smooth pebbles and discussed about them. They swam in the river; chased each other on the banks of the river; sang songs; played games; danced; dramatized stories... They had rich experiences with the river Pennar... Every experience will be stored in their memory forever and the same they can recollect in their future.

River Pennar taught children many things... about water plants; about fishes; about shells and cones; about birds which try to catch the fish; about cucumber, watermelons - plants which grow on the sand during the summer; about the Vemana festival which will be celebrated on the river banks once in a year; about pollution of the river water with the effluents from the nearby paper factory.

After swimming all the children came out. Evening Sun was about to set on the other side of the river. I sat in meditation, watching the sunset! Children also sat in a row. Jyothi started telling "OM" and everybody joined in chanting "OM". On one side the sun set and on the other side a beautiful, rhythmic sound of "OM" echoing in the quiet, peaceful and pleasant atmosphere. A unified voice - it is a rare experience!

Self Learning Corners

I stepped into the science laboratory, which was away from the main school building. In fact it was not a laboratory, but it was a "science corner." Two small tables and a few science apparatus were arranged there. Mallikarjuna was experimenting on heat. Now and then he was looking into the work-card prepared by the teachers, which was lying down on the floor... The moment I entered this corner, one of the balloons burst. In fact that was the last of the balloons that I have given to him to perform the experiment. Mallikarjuna informed me with an innocent face, "All the balloons are burst..."

"See, if you alone burst all the five balloons and finished the big candle, then, how the others can do the experiments on heat? Our school is a poor school, where from can I get material for your class-mates? You have to be careful in using the material given to you. For me, it is very difficult to provide five balloons and one candle for each one of you, really very difficult..." I reprimanded him very gently and enquired about the results of his experiments. And later I explained him how to handle test-tube etc. After that I moved towards the Sapota trees.

Science Corner provided children with the necessary apparatus, various chemicals, for the preparation of air, water, oxygen, carbon dioxide, etc. Instructions were given in the work-cards. Children did their experiments and recorded their findings without teacher's help. It was really a burden for us to replace any broken test-tube and other things. But it was nothing when compared to their enthusiasm in running and reporting their discoveries to their teachers. Young Archimedes all! Of all, Mallikarjuna alone exhibited the qualities of a future scientist. He put very many questions to me even when I was taking rest and thus quenched his curiosity. I rarely saw such thirst for knowledge among others.

Under the Sapota trees, "Pottery corner" was arranged. Ravi and Jaya were sitting in front of the pottery wheel and making an earthen pan. Actually they want to make a small pot, but it came out as a pan! After rotating the wheel they started the work, but the clay was falling down from the wheel! Jaya was arrogant!

"It is not coming..." she desperately threw the clay onto the wheel. I took charge, sat in front of the wheel, put the clay onto the wheel. Ravi rotated the wheel. Using my thumb I prepared a small earthen glass...

"See, we should have patience. Whatever we do, we have to fix our total concentration onto it..." I told her and moved again towards the main school building. Jaya alone developed her skill here.

Shanta and Hemalatha were sitting in the veranda, outside the school building and were painting. It was the "Art corner." Hemalatha drew a

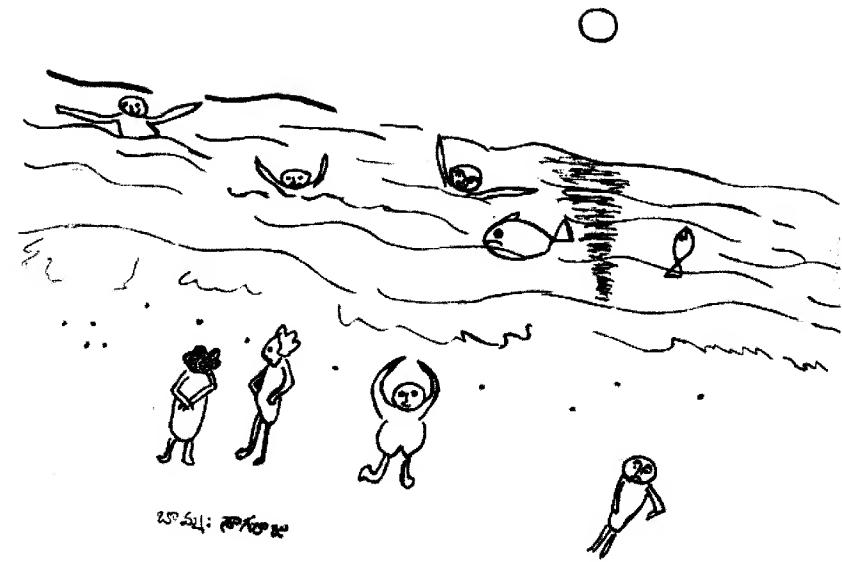
picture of a girl with a nice skirt with colourful design. Hemalatha is not interested to draw other than girls' pictures. On the other hand, Shanta drew a very small picture of a girl on a big chart and gave inappropriate and unattractive colours. She thought that she completed the painting work and started watching the surroundings, not much interested in painting! I took Shanta's chart, enlarged her girl's picture with symmetry and explained her how to draw a big picture on a big chart and how to use brushes!

Artists in Vijaya, Hemalatha, Pedda Nagaraju were unmasked. They involved in painting paying little heed to the class timings. Nagaraju drew many abstract paintings. Hemalatha always painted the figures of small girls with beautiful designs of flowers and creepers on their petticoats. The aspect that made Vijaya both a writer and an artist was her patience. It always interested me to watch her do her work so happily for any length of time.

Now I entered the school building. In one of the corners, we arranged a small library. It was a "Reading corner". Vijaya was silently reading a translated book of Mark Twain. Jungli was reading "Chandamama" (a children's monthly) stories loudly! Vijaya felt inconvenience with his loud reading. She warned him to read silently. But, he didn't.

In the *Reading Corner* we kept story books and other journals for the children. They could read what they liked. After reading, we ask them questions on the topic they had learned. Ravi, Sudhir, Vijaya, Chinna Nagaraju, Jyothi, Kavitha, etc. had become bookworms, so to say. Vijaya exhibited the sign of a future writer. Whatever she wrote, be it a story or any essay or her own diary, she wrote descriptively and in a detailed manner. In order to verbalize her thoughts she wrote very neatly and in a leisurely fashion with admirable patience. Malli possessed a wonderful imaginative capability. Ravi, Nagaraju, wrote less, but showed glimpses of their philosophical outlook.

In another corner, Sudhir and Mastan were prostrate on the floor and referring to dictionaries for meanings of difficult words. Children learn



the meanings of the given word and find out antonyms, synonyms, and homonyms by referring the dictionaries. It was the "*Language corner*". We kept a few dictionaries and a work-card in that corner. Mastan looked into the work-card and read a word. Then Sudhir referred the dictionary and read the meaning of the word. He shouted, "Ah! Mastan! Look into this, how many meanings are here for this small word. Nearly one and half page meanings are given...!" Sudhir was really amazed! Initially, the children disliked referring these bulky editions but gradually children like Nagaraju began to show enthusiasm. But, on the whole, this corner too was boring.

In the third corner of the school building Nagaraju lonely sat before four Telugu books and searching for the answers. Sometimes he was unable to find answers, so he was impatient! This was the "*Reference corner*". We usually keep 2-4 books of different writers on the same subject in this corner and with a work-card of one or two questions. The children have to refer and find out various versions of different writers to the same question. I sat beside Nagaraju and explained him how to refer! Afterwards they should discuss them in the class. It was tough for them. The reason is unavailability of books in Telugu for children according to

their age and standards. Whatever books that existed did not suit them. The language used in the books was too complicated for their age and unnecessary figures of speech made them no better. That's why children showed no interest even to sit in this corner.

In all there were six "Self Learning Corners" in the school. In every corner we kept a work-card. According to the instructions of the work-card children have to work at their own interest, own risk and own intelligence, without the help of the teacher. Children have been divided into pairs and each pair got a chance to work in each corner once in a week. Each pair spent one period a day in those self learning corners.

At first children could not understand this concept of "Self learning", because all the while they were depending on the instructions of the teacher. Now, in these Self Learning Corners no teacher was with them, no supervision, no guidance by teachers, no consultation with teachers... Everything will be in work cards, they have to read and learn silently on their own. Every pair has to work all by themselves! No interference with others; no classroom noises, quarrels and teasing.

The interests of the children grew slowly but steadily, these corners really helped children to develop their intellectual process!

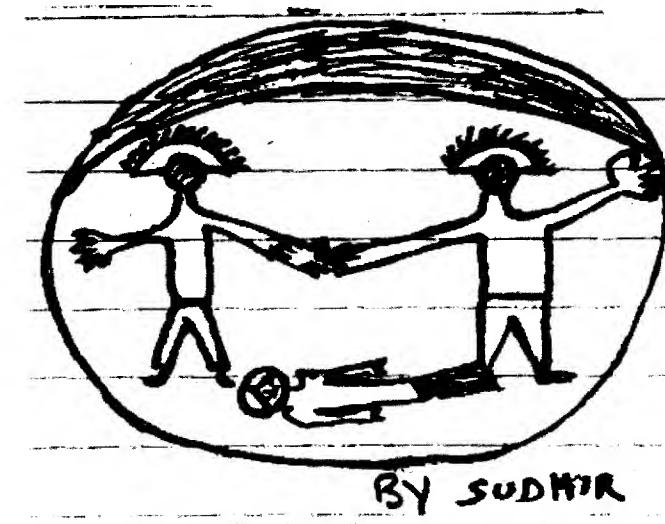
Mallikarjuna was interested in science experiments and he demanded to put him in the science corner every day. The artists inside Vijaya and Pedda Nagaraju emerged out and sharpened. Ravi, Vijaya and Sudhir became bookworms, whenever they get leisure they used to take a book and sit in a corner. Shanta and Hemalatha did not show any interest in anything. Mastan was interested in acting. Jungli and Jaya were interested in manual work, such as working in the farms etc.

We really worked hard to discover the inherent potentialities of the children. Their likes and dislikes never came out under the supervision of a teacher. Within few months after starting the *Self-Learning Corners*, the true interests of the children began to come out. This was very surprising. But, due to the paucity of funds, we were really concerned about the flowering of their interests.

Exhibition

Ms. Sobha is a feminist. She works for women's rights. She often discusses women problems, particularly the security of women through law and justice! She is a good artist also. She makes posters on women issues and exhibits them - thus she brings women's issues for public attention and understanding!

She is one of the best friends to the school. Now and then she visits the school and discusses many issues. After a few months hard work she designed many posters on "Women and Law." On 8th March 1988, on the eve of International Women's Day she exhibited those posters in Women's Library at Nellore. She invited the school children to the exhibition!



For two days, before going to the exhibition, children were apprised of women's issues. They narrated their experiences... How their fathers rule their families; how they torture their mothers! Children classified the works that women and men do during the day; how much time they spend on each activity; which works are difficult; which difficult works men and women do; why men overpower the women; why men will not

help the women in household duties; how men behave towards women; how mothers-in-law behave towards the daughters-in-law; how the boys studying in school behave towards the girls... Not only these, but, many other things related to women problems were discussed by children. They really felt sad!

During the same time, three persons attempted suicide in the village! One because his wife eloped; another woman attempted suicide unable to bear the tortures inflicted by her husband; and the third one was an old man... All the three attempted suicide because they couldn't get over the tragedies of the life and discontent. Every three or four months someone commits suicide in the village! Children enquired the realities and analyzed the reasons in the school, during assembly sessions.

Children do see, do listen. But, nothing will impair their thinking process. So, here the important role of the school is to help children by bringing out and analysing the issues which children regularly see and come across. If necessary they have to participate, collect information and try to understand the root causes of the problems! It is an very important area where the teachers have to devote their attention.

You may think whether the primary school children can understand big problems like women issues etc? And you may also say that, these issues are above their comprehension when compared to their ages. So, those should not be included as lessons or in the syllabus! But, I question, how many authors of text books today understand children's psychology and their mental abilities? How many text book writers have knowledge about children's imaginative world and their dreams?

If you open the text books, they will stink with useless morals! But, they will not allow children to observe the life, to do research, investigate, to analyze, to share their experiences. They will not provide an opportunity to take care about women, about the Nature, about the community, about the Nation, about the Universe and at last about themselves! They will teach useless morals and compel them to by-heart and pass the examinations, but do not teach practical attitudes; outlook, responsibilities and they will not teach to LOVE life. But sometimes ironically they teach escapism!!

The surroundings, environment and socio, economic conditions (the poverty, illiteracy, parents negligence and may be because of selfishness of the heads of the society...) of the children are very delicate, sensitive and crucial. Children are not in a position to digest the Government's text books! They badly need education which can help and analyze their life!

The second day afternoon, children painted pathetic pictures: Mother-in-law pouring kerosene on her daughter-in-law; a bride-groom taking dowry from the father of bride; extra marital contacts of a husband; a sadist husband; a child marriage scene.

All these problems were faced by the parents of the children. Children know the problems and sadness of their parents. They got a simple introduction about issues of women. Later, they visited the exhibition of "*Women and Law*".

Sobha and her team welcomed and explained each and every poster in a simple language to the children. Now children have so many questions in their minds. They expressed their views very freely without any hesitation. These are children from primary classes, but, learning here in this exhibition, though these topics are above their standards. Even the graduates do not have much knowledge about many of the realities of life!

That day, there were tears in every eye, particularly the girls! Their hearts were filled with pain! Certainly, children like, Mastan, Sudhir did not like the exhibition. Because, it was not an interesting subject to them... Courts, Policemen, Law etc., did not create much interest in the children. But, they understood that there should not be double standards in treatment towards men and women!

After watching the posters, they made a small interview with Sobha.

From posters, Jaya entered into Sobha's life: "Sister! You are married, why don't you wear 'Mangala sutras'? Why don't you wear ear rings? Why don't you put 'Kumkum' on your forehead?"

**agriculture based
teaching**

Education Through Work

Why I have to educate children? Because, if I bring out their innermost latent talents, then they may become real human beings, to spread goodness and to function with clear understanding about the world.

In the attempt to make man and society happier, man and society have been separated from Nature. With the false notion that buying and selling of commodities alone will bring security and happiness, foundation was laid for competition. But these factors lead to encouragement of hatred and violence. As a result of this approach towards materialism, we are parting ourselves from the peace, happiness and pleasant art of life. It's like going to an ocean to quench one's thirst. Distancing, ourselves from nature and destroying nature lead finally to destruction of ourselves. Only by realizing the destruction - within ourself and from outside we can pave a way for "**Complete life.**"

There is a story. Once a student went to a sculptor to learn sculpture. The master told him to learn drawing first, so that the student will know the symmetry of the body. The student met the Art Master. The master suggested him to learn dance first, so that he will be aware of movements of the body. The student patiently met the dance master,



who asked the student to learn music first, so that he will know the rhythm. The student met the music master. The master asked him to learn literature first, so that he will know about feelings of oneself. The student met the master of literature, who asked the student to observe the language of the people, so that he will be aware of the words used in different contexts. When the student started observing the people, he had been in touch with the life with its struggles, pleasures and pains!

This story tells us two things - First, every subject is interrelated and the second LIFE is the only source to learn!

If one observes the present education system, surely one can find that our teaching system is disintegrated. Is not the competition to specialize in disintegrated courses the cause for deterioration of human values? Is it not the cause to disturb the flourishing of integrated minds? Then, how can I expect the spreading of goodness in the world?

Alternative schools are trying their best to solve this problem. Though they teach upto the level of secondary education, they are linking teaching academics with arts and crafts and assisting children to understand the relation and integration between the subjects. For example, when they teach a lesson, they ask children to draw picture, to make clay models or to do collage or to enact a role play etc. Certainly this integrated teaching process provides opportunities to children to be creative.

But, still few questions are calling my attention to think. By linking academics with arts and crafts, are we encouraging children to develop "*perfect professional skills*" in any one of those arts and crafts - such as art or music or clay work or pottery or carpentry? Linking arts and crafts with academics will provide a chance to the children to understand educational concepts more clearly! But, in terms of teaching a SKILL, lesser importance is given.

First of all, I enjoy teaching children. And then I committed to give my services to poor children who cannot afford to buy 'right education'.

Am I just satisfied with teaching children and preparing them for mainstream examination oriented system?

Is the present education system trying to find any alternative to the bad socio-economic conditions of the poor children?

Still, untouchability; clashes between different castes and communities are going on. Rural girls get married when they are at the age of puberty (12-14 years) and settle in their family life. Jungli, Mallikarjuna, Vijaya, Jaya and Sri Laxmi were all our students. Due to their economic conditions Jungli joined a carpentry shop to earn a livelihood as a carpenter; Sri Laxmi, another intelligent student, who wrote beautiful, simple English, studied four years with us, but because of financial problems, her father put her as cattle grazer. Mallikarjuna also passed 10th class in first division, had lots of dreams to become a doctor but now he is helping his father in his small tea stall in their village. Though Vijaya passed 10th class, she lost her chances of going for higher education; got married and she is a mother to a baby! Only Hemalatha, the daughter of a middle class businessman joined the Junior College. Then, when we came to watch mannerisms, roughness and using slang etc., among these poor rural children - these all are misinfluences of the society in which they live.

What is the purpose of education?

What answer is with me to show some alternative for their socio-economic conditions towards continuing their higher studies and stand on their own feet after the school?

Fighting against the social discriminations is not such an easy task. But we have to find some alternatives to settle economic drawbacks of these poor children to some extent.

I tried my best to find a solution for their poor economic conditions, and expected continuation of their higher studies, and expected they will become fully educated citizens and they may start their own life with freedom and enjoyment.

In this regard I tried to link education with some “**Productive work**”... as an integrated process of learning, where children get an opportunity to learn professional skills along with general education. And I want to

provide some stipend towards their ‘*manual work*’, which may help to continue their education and to some extent they may help the school to be self-reliant. But in practice I failed to provide such stipend to the students.

Not only bad socio-economic conditions of our school children, but also, the experiments of A. S. Makarenko’s “*Learning in a Commune*” (it is my wording) and Gandhiji’s “*Basic Education*” theories have inspired me to stand on the thought. These are not just mere theories, but give some spiritual insight along with tackling socio-economic difficulties.

I tried to link learning process with some manual work, particularly with agricultural work. I felt, it can provide opportunities to the students to develop themselves as “**Complete persons**”. At *Yatakal Training Centre*, we had a big kitchen garden and we have grown ground nut crop in half-an-acre of land. Then we did only a little to integrate academics with work; but we were able to save good amount of money on buying vegetables and groundnuts. Both teacher trainees and school children were involved in this activity. At *Srujana School*, though we didn’t get profits by selling agricultural products, we successfully designed a curriculum by linking entire academic learning with agriculture.

Agriculture work provided an opportunity to the children to be with the Nature. In Nature, children intuitively develop their natural faculties of observation, curiosity, experimenting mind, etc. They enjoyed the total freedom. The following sections reflect how children learned academics and how they developed their reading and writing skills along with creative expression by working in the nature.

Finally, entire Indian philosophy from thousands of years is based on “*Work*” (*karma*). Very few persons renounce the world, and meditate in caves towards unifying themselves with the ultimate Truth. But, persons who remain as family holders have to work. Through work one has to observe oneself... his/ her emotions, attitudes, relationships, thoughts, skilfulness of the work, creativity, etc. and realize the Truth. If one has faith in God or in Dharma (in the context of Buddha), he has to work with sincerity, with full attention and with joy, leaving the Result to the God/ Dharma. Though he got exploited, as he got faith in God/

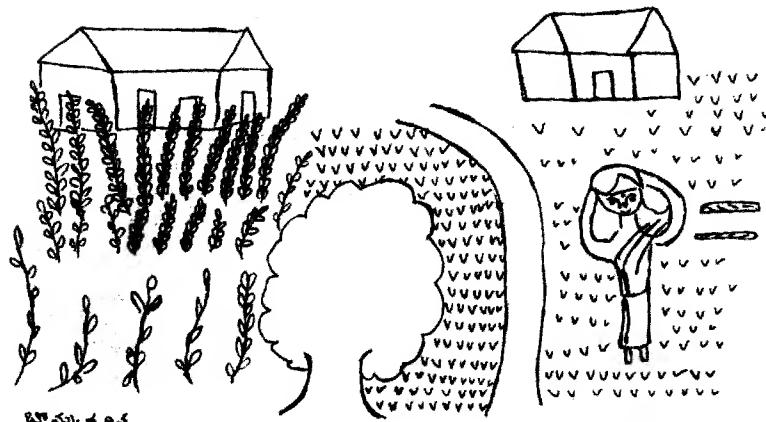
Dharma, he has to feel God in every human being and in every creature and to continue Serving them! That is his/ her meditation through work. There are many meditation techniques in India to observe oneself through work.

So, when I mention about involving children in “*Productive Work*”, it is not just to find out a solution for their socio-economic conditions, but also, spiritual, i.e. to find oneself and to be an integrated being in the “*Nature*”.

Learning in Nature

the educator should talk about all these things, not just verbally, but he himself must feel it... the world, the world of nature and the world of man. they are interrelated. man cannot escape from the consequences when he destroys nature, he is destroying himself. the enemy is not the other but you. to live in such harmony with nature, with the world, naturally brings about a different world.

- J. Krishna Murthy,
Letters to Schools - 2



Agriculture Based Teaching was really a great experience. We learned many things by singing and dancing, as it were. Who taught the children discipline and what attention was required for them to learn and how did they assist their brothers and sisters back home were all the questions that agitated me.

Restrictions, code of conduct, disciplinary rules... none of these were required for the children to learn and study. Only then, discipline could be achieved in them.

We introduced **Agriculture Based Teaching Project** primarily to make children feel themselves as part of the nature and to develop intimacy with the nature. We set two more targets in it. One, to develop love and respect for manual labour, and secondly to make the school self-reliant. Whether we achieved the targets or not, what was important was to learn in nature. The **Agriculture Based Teaching** lasted three months after the commencement of the rainy season. Children worked in the fields for a period or two to gain practical experiential knowledge. Periods were devoted the next day to discuss as to what they had done the day before. The teaching included ploughing, sowing the seeds, constructing water banks, the using of the fertilizers and manures, weeding, harvesting, etc... Agricultural work also helped them in learning other subjects like Telugu, Science, Mathematics as well as painting, music, acting etc. They secured abundant opportunities to develop their creativity.

Students take part in production work, learn all the needed skills, grow crops, market them and make school self-reliant. This teaching project also helps them to develop a very clear worldly outlook as well as they learn to work “collectively” with others. The relationship among persons, communities and nature can be realized.

Agriculture based teaching project is in three stages. In every stage, students observe, experiment, discuss and study.

On the school farm, maize (Monocotyledon) was grown on one acre, ladies finger on half acre, and cucumber (creeper) on half acre. Children wrote songs on various agricultural activities like weeding, harvesting during the English and Telugu periods. They wrote stories based on the

interviews conducted with the farmers. They prepared an Agriculture Dictionary.

Science periods were devoted for writing essays on various aspects of their work like land, soil, types of soils, agricultural implements, manure, fertilizers, etc. Graphs, statistics, percentages, ratios, profit and loss, etc. were learnt in the mathematics periods. Huge paintings were drawn in the arts and crafts periods. Clay toys were made, and herbarium was prepared. Thus Nature had become our text book. Children's surprise knew no bounds when any dead body of an owl or a squirrel was shown to them revealing all the visceral organs. Likewise, they learned about various kinds of trees, birds, animals and worms in the fields.

We used to chat with the children on various topics such as human relations; the relationship between nature and man; life-cycle of various creatures. Extensive discussions were held on pollution, the destruction of nature etc. To destroy nature is to kill ourselves... this truth children understood with sufficient practice and time.

But throwing stones at the trees was a common occurrence. Steeling of sugarcane during the field visits was reality. In spite of all these, children understood that they were learning from Nature, not from the prescribed text books. Mallikarjuna and the like were stunned to see their own essays being taught in the classes.

A lot of work, a proper and good thought, experience - importance to all these equally and to arouse a great outlook of light among students is the only aim of ***Agriculture Based Teaching Project***.



Permaculture Based Teaching Project

Permaculture means "Permanent Agriculture". It encourages diversified cultivation. Planned organic farming is called as Permaculture. Unnecessary labour will be reduced through the practise of permaculture plan. A permaculturist may effectively utilise natural energy sources i.e. solar energy, wind energy and the rain water. With this plan a permaculturist may develop harmonious relationships with trees, crop plants, vegetable plants, farm birds, animals... which may mutually cooperate and help each other for survival! This plan is easily adoptable in all circumstances and all local environments! Finally, a farmer's family may be self-reliant and may help other farmers to be self-reliant too!

In a permaculture farm contour bunds with Glyricidia trees which are nitrogen fixing trees can be found. These trees not only fix nitrogen in the soil but also cover the soil with its leaves! These bunds and trees can stop soil erosion and increase moisture in the soil. Diversified crop pattern will be followed in between these bunds. Instead of cultivating a single crop (monoculture system), mixed crops are encouraged - whether it a dry or wet land. Red gram, millets, Jowar are cultivated together at the same time. At first creepers will be harvested. Normally these creepers are 45-60 day crops. Next, main crop i.e. Jowar, groundnuts, etc. will be harvested. At last, red gram will be harvested. It is a long duration crop and will grow higher than the main crop plants. All these three types of crops will sufficiently fulfil the needs of a family and provide work to the labour. Diversified cropping system can efficiently reduce pests and develop fertility in the soil. In the middle of these crops marigold, medicinal plants will be grown. These plants certainly avoid pests and control weed plants. In windy sides of the farm huge trees will be grown at borders. Just before huge trees, in the second row small trees will be grown. In the third row bush type trees will be grown. So these trees will stop the heavy winds in June - July months and stop the loss of the crop by the wind. Normally fruit bearing trees such as guava, will be grown at borders. So the farmer and his children will get variety of fruits around the year. Wherever the land has slope, there a small pond or a check dam will be constructed, so it will help to raise

underground water table and provide water to the animals during the offseason.

All this is an outline introduction about permaculture method. With this diversified and integrated agriculture plan, much attention, concern and greater responsibility will be maintained on the earth and the environment. A good and harmonious relation will be developed between man and Nature. Experience of an integrated life, natural perspective towards life will be developed.

In Paccha Saale and in Chitti Badi students worked in the farm in the same season of the same year. Based on the work experience they tried their best to understand the relationship between Nature and Agriculture. With this understanding they discussed about good and bad effects of the modern agricultural practises. Children did not participate in ploughing activity. But they sowed the seeds, removed the weed plants, watered, sprayed pesticides when caterpillar attacked the crop and finally harvested the crop. They have been involved in various activities through proper activity sheets prepared by the teachers.

Field Observation Sheets:

Field observation sheets were prepared by the teachers and photostat copies were given to every student. According to the sheets students daily measured the growth of the crop plants with a scale and noted the height; noted the temperature of the day with a thermometer; noted the rainfall with the rain gauge... So, these observation sheets helped to learn science and mathematics subjects in the classrooms. And children developed variety of skills such as keen observation faculty; active working with nature with curiosity and with pleasure! They have successfully come out of laziness and drowsiness.

Interview Schedules:

Teachers prepared interview schedules and children met farmers in pairs, asked questions and gathered variety of information about traditional and modern agricultural practises. With these, children successfully came

out from fear, shyness, etc. and developed interviewing skill and got a rare opportunity to understand about the traditional and modern practices.

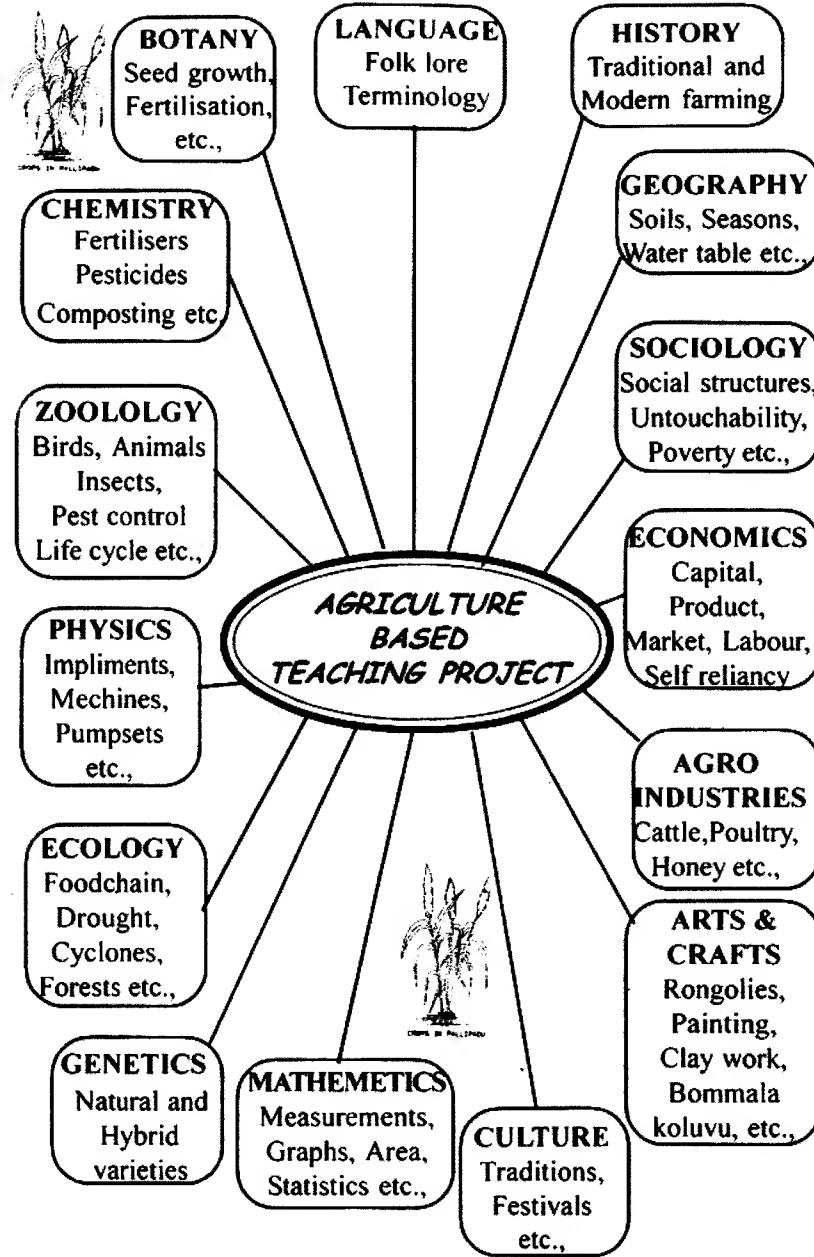
Collections:

Teachers assisted the children to collect variety of clay; soils; stones; seeds; barks of the trees; small branches with leaves and flowers to make herbarium; corns; nests of the birds; feathers; bones... This collection developed an understanding about their environment. Children made variety of collages with interest, curiosity and discussed about these in the concerned classes.

Visiting and observing other farms:

Teachers and children visited few nearby farms to make a study about diversified crop patterns; differences between organic and modern agricultural practices. They met the farmers and interviewed them. They got an overall perspective about growing commercial crops and the profits of practicing permaculture!

Learning agriculture is a profession. Just developing professional skill among the children in agriculture (permaculture) is not the main objective of this teaching project. But, to link the learning process with work, and find a right definition to 'Education' is the real objective.



Literature class :

Songs During Weeding Time

I was singing few folk songs under the tamarind tree to introduce folk songs which are sung during weeding, grinding etc. My voice is not good. But I tried to convince the children and create interest about the rhythm of songs.

I wrote one folk song on the black board, explained the metrical composition; metaphors; rhyming and rhythm of each line. A few supporting words can be used at the end of each line in the folk lore. I explained about it also! Children are familiar with folk songs like lullabies, bhajans, romantic songs and mystic folk songs.

I observed that children did not understand it. Mastan and Mallikarjuna started to write on the ground.

Then I asked children to tell a line each, so as to compose a song by the group. Everyone has to tell one line keeping in view the previous lines.

By that time a crow has snatched away one of the owlet! The other owlets started crying with a peculiar big sound! All children lifted their heads and listened to the cry! Jaya hesitated and started the lesson again.

Everyone told one line. I helped them to tell the line with metrical composition and rhyming! Everyone tried their best to follow the instructions and formed an idea in the total song. But, three children like Shanta just recited prose. They have not at all tried to follow the metrical composition and rhyming. I again changed those prose lines into the lines of the song by changing and adding new words! I did not remove or add with a force from my side. I asked children to find out suitable words, as substitutes for the previous words, sometimes I gave four or five words, asked them to choose right one, which suits into the particular matrix and rhyme... It was a two way exploration! Ultimately all children prepared a song! After completion I sang by using snaps with fingers. With this demonstration children understood the rhyme

and rhythm of a song! They were surprised! Now they learnt a new skill... Writing a song!

After the demonstration, I asked the children, "Tomorrow, we are going to weed in the maize fields. Then we have to sing songs to forget our fatigue! Our elders used to sing songs during the weeding. In fact, all folk songs took birth during the work... Work and song are not different! Can you write a few 'weed songs'?"

Children dispersed. I said once again, "Whenever we write or paint or whatever we do, we have to meditate for a few moments. If we want to write a song on weeding, we have to sit before the maize plants and meditate, then only we can write good songs..."

Vijaya and Sudhir went into deep meditation.

Children wrote songs! Spelling mistakes were there! But, somehow, they caught the idea and rhythm in writing songs! They meditated at every letter and freely expressed their feelings in the songs. I was very proud of them - my children wrote songs!

We can observe, not only what they wrote, how they wrote, but also the psychology of the children behind those songs; their family conditions; financial difficulties; other situations - all these have been reflected in those songs.

*"COME women come for weeding!
Come men come for weeding!
Come men come for making rows!
Come men come for making canals!
Come women come for sowing!
Come men come for giving manure!
Come women come for weeding!
Come men come for spraying pesticides!
Come women come for harvesting the corn!
Come men come to fill the bags with corn!
Fill the bags and load the lorry!
Load the lorry and earn the money!
Earn the money and we all can share!
We can share and live happily!"*

- Jungli, 11 years.

Jungli's song is one of the most creditable song. In his song, he has mentioned the order of the agricultural activities, he distinguished the works of women and men. At the end he wished to live together quiet comfortably by sharing the profits! He is just 11 years! This idea of "sharing" is not just from his lips, but, his poverty, economic difficulties of his family provoked him to say "sharing".

Whoever study in a "good" school, should get this feeling! We can teach morals easily about secularism, socialism and unity. But, how can we nourish these feelings among the children? How can they recognize these, and express through a creative form? And how can they put them in practice? Teaching morals is not enough, there should be practical education, where children can *feel* the necessity of secularism, socialism, democracy and moreover human values...

Kalyani, a teacher, composed tunes for Jungli's song and we all sang it not only during weeding, but even on the roads, everywhere. It haunted us every moment nearly for two months...

"Take off weed	- O Weed!
Occupied the crop	- O Weed!
Plants don't get water	- O Weed!
Plants don't grow	- O Weed!
As we know pains	- O Weed!
Back is paining	- O Weed!
Loss to the people	- O Weed!
Weed Weed don't grow!	
Give joy to us	- O Weed!"

- Vijaya, 11 years

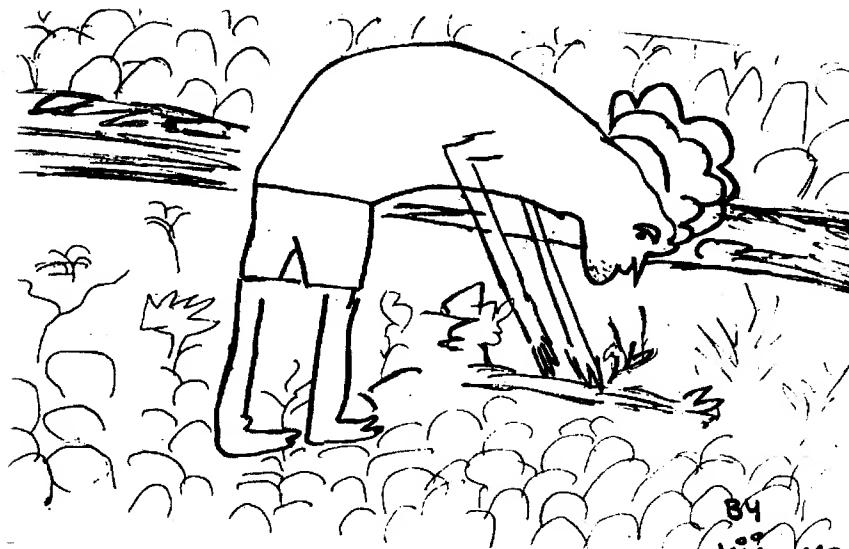
Ravi, 11 years, reflected the life in an ordinary way:

*"Take off the weed
In the greenery field
Come men and women!"*

*Come on! Farmers!
Come on! Common men!
To get on our lives
Live by labour work!
Come on! Farmers!"*

Kalyani tuned all songs on “weeding” and helped children practice the songs.

Working in the fields, teaching and creation are all not separate entities; but, they are interrelated and intermixed!!



Language class:

Agriculture Dictionary

Parrots are chattering on the silk cotton tree. Cuckoo from the Sapota tree is, now and then informing that she is listening our lessons. Squirrels chasing each other, came near the children and ran away with fear. Labour women, who are plucking brinjals, beans, etc. in the field are chitchatting with each other. The entire surroundings of the school is very quiet and serious, except the school!

I said to the children, “We want to do agriculture and simultaneously learn all subjects. Then, I think, we want to know the terms, which are used in agriculture. Whatever crop it is, like groundnuts, paddy, ladies finger, betel nuts... whatever crops our villagers grow, we have to make

a list of agricultural terms, which our farmers use. After preparing the list, we will prepare an Agriculture Dictionary.”

Children were divided into three groups. One group went into the veranda. Second group sat under the tamarind trees. Last group sat under the Sapota tree. I sat on the school steps. Now and then one of the group members would come to me to clear their doubts.

First, they listed out all the words, which they knew. The group members discussed whether the word belongs to agriculture. Sometimes they consulted with the working women in the field. After the school they consulted their parents and totally they gathered 150 to 200 words, which are generally used in agriculture by farmers of Pallipadu.

After gathering the words, again I gave work to them. “You collected the words used in agriculture, particularly in our village. You did a good work. But, we have to know the meanings of these words. First, you write whatever meanings you know. If you don’t know refer dictionaries. Sometimes one word will have several meanings. You take all these meanings! If you do not get meanings in the dictionaries then consult your parents.”

Now children did not go away, they sat near to me. They sat in three different circles. They got several doubts while referring the dictionaries. A few words are funny to spell, children used to laugh while they spelt such words.

Mastan, Nagaraju, Mallikarjuna, Jungli gave nick names to girls and tease them. The girls used to get irritated. And girls too gave nick names to boys and shouted, “Mastan! Mastan! O, small bullock...”, “Nagaraju! Nagaraju! O, snake!!” They used to complain me, and sometimes cried...

One child stretches his two legs, keeps book on them and write; one extends one leg and folds another; one sits crossed legs; one sits quietly without moving; one chitchats, laughs; one goes and inspects the other groups and while returning knocks on heads of the others; one calls the others with nicknames. But, all are involved in referring huge dictionaries, finding meanings and writing them in their note books!

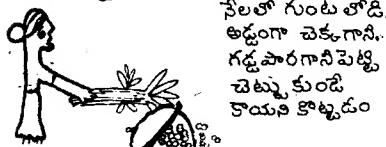
Now they gathered meanings too! Most of the meanings came out from their experience. Now we entered into the third phase.

Again, I asked them to put the words in alphabetical order, like a *pucca* dictionary.

After a weeks' strain, children got familiar with words used in agriculture. They knew the difference, relativity, rhythm between the words; they got in touch with the linguistic importance of the words; the beauty in spelling them; use them for fun... They have got in touch with words by playing, singing, quarrelling, teasing...

At last, I asked them, "You prepared the words list first, then gathered the meanings. Is there any possibility to draw a picture to every word. For example, for the word "sickle" you can draw a small picture of sickle. Similarly, for the word "harvest", draw a picture of harvesting... For a few words you have to draw a scene. Try your best to draw pictures to all words you collected..."

కాయ = పువ్వి సుంచి వుట్టి అంచేహడ్చం
ఉయు కొట్టుచుం = వెయు కునగకాయ త్యాటుం



తలవ చేయటం = వెంటలకు నీళ్లు, వుట్టి
దాంకి రెండు గొల మధ్య పాదత్తున
కాప చేయటం

కావడి = ఒక కట్టున
తీసుకుటి తెండుకిసుల
తూటు, కట్టి వాటిల్లి
బుయుతులు పెట్టుకున్నాయి
ముఖ్యంగా భుజనపెట్టు
క్రీస్తి కుండలు, సాయి
పొస్తులు.

తాంకుర భాలు = పంగల కలు పండు రంపు రంపులు
రంపులు కట్టిసి, రెండు రంపులు మధ్య
చుట్టురం కట్టి, రావ్చు, రాయు పెట్టి
కుదిపే కెప్పుకులకు వగులుయంది.



కుంచుం = ఒచ్చు తెలుచు కునేటిష్టుడు
ఉపయాగించేచి.



కుప్పు = పంట పండిలక
పూతు ఒక ద్వార గుట్ట
పెస్తారు.
కుప్పు పెయటం

కూతీ = ఒక మధ్యి హని
చెప్పే దబ్బులు ఇస్తారు.
దానుకూతీ అంచేరు.
కూతురు = కూతీచేసి
పాడు - కూతీలు

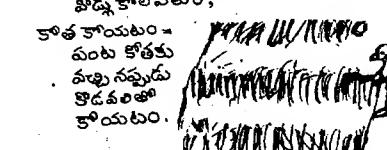


తొదువరీ = పంట
లము కాపులు
ఇకి పాకివట్టి
పని మట్టు



తొలువుటం = పుత్రునా వస్తులు తెక్కించుటం
పొట్టుకాపువుటం.

కొత్త కాపుటం =
పంట కొత్తు
పాలు వస్తువు
తెక్కువులు
కొయటం.



I gave them small pieces of papers of two inches width. For two days they did hard work, and drew the pictures on those papers. If they drew wrong, we had a small conversation, whether the picture is suitable for that word. Now children had a touch with the pictures of those words.

I thanked the children. I worked hard for another week and made a beautiful "**Agriculture Dictionary**" with children's pictures.

Children were happy because they compiled a dictionary!!

Children of how many schools get this kind of opportunity... to smell, to taste, to feel, to experience the words...??

Science class:

Pulse Seeds and Non-pulse Seeds

All children dispersed to remove the weeds. They identified and removed the sprouts and saplings of neem, tamarind, soapnut, maize and grass plants. Within five minutes they all came back to me and sat in a circle.

Crows on the tree were calling something with unbearable sounds! Sparrows were continuing their musical practice. Parrots on the coconut trees were making nuisance. Now and then squirrels visit us and observe what children are doing here! The labourers who were going just beside us through the tamarind groove, have a look into our circle, watching us and leaving us behind...

I asked children to keep plants they collected from the fields in an order. They demonstrated the plants on the ground.

First they arranged a seed. Beside it a germinating seed, third a sprout with roots, fourth a sprout without seed-cap, beside it a tender plant, then a young plant, lastly fully grown plant with strong root and shoot system. They rightly arranged without much guidance from me.

I kept various seeds in front of the children. Since a week I was growing paddy and green gram seeds in a plate, now they are germinated...

Mallikarjuna guessed very well, he cried out, "So, now Anna is going to say about seed growth..."

Our conversation started. Children were observing the seeds and growing plants. They touched the plants, turned them, and slipped into deep thinking! Children who quarrel, tease each other are also involved in keen observation. They were not even aware that the squirrels ran just beside them.

I drew pictures in the soil with my fingers, "Now we will observe another interesting thing! Just take the seeds and cut them into two..." I gave tamarind, neem, soapnut, green gram, paddy and maize seeds to them.

Children removed the husk and observed two halves in tamarind, neem and green gram seeds, but they did not find two halves in maize and paddy seeds!!

Mastan with impatience beat the paddy and maize seeds with a stone, the seed was thrashed into powder, but not two halves!

I suggested them to observe these seeds and also the growing plants. I have shown the cotyledons of the seeds and asked the difference between the leaves and cotyledons. They responded. They do not know the technical terms of the plants and seeds... like cotyledons, seed coat, etc.

"These stout, first leaves were in the seed. They take water and germinate! The stout leaves help the sprout grow with roots and stem. When the plant has grown, these stout leaves get dried and fall down. The thin and green leaves grow in the stem..." They recognized the difference between cotyledons and the leaves.

"Saplings of neem, tamarind, gram have two first leaves, but what about maize and paddy seeds?" I enquired.

"There is nothing..."

"It is single seed..."

"There are no pulses..."

"Seed and the pulse both are same..."

After their responses, I suggested them to observe the seeds again, "See the natural phenomenon! Some seeds have two halves, which means pulses! Some seeds do not have two halves... How can we name these seeds?"

I have to teach the terms Monocotyledons and Di-cotyledons. But I do not like to teach the terms of science which are prescribed by the Government text books in primary schools...

Lots of terms are prescribed in Government text books for classes III to V. In science text book Cotyledons, tap root system, pollination, fertilizations terms are prescribed. In social text books the terms like democracy, independence, *satyagraha*, *ahimsa*, truth, non-cooperation, *swadeshi* and many more terms are imposed on primary school children. I doubt if the primary school children grasp the essence of these words, experience these words and coin with a feeling again ??? They can't! They cannot feel the terms, but simply they by-heart the terms and write examinations... Whoever cannot by-heart, they have to follow mal-practices!!! Is it not one of the cause for the high failures in examinations and dropout rate?

Here I do not like to say, Monocotyledons and Di-cotyledons, but, I do not know what terms I can coin instead of them...

Jaya cried loudly, with clapping of hands: "Pulse seeds and Non-Pulse seeds." The problem is solved.

Children find their own terms instead of science terms which are imposed on the school children today! My children know better than me! Pulse seeds and Non-Pulse seeds... What an easy terminology has taken birth!! For fun sake I introduced the science terms, but children failed to spell them.

"We are growing ladies finger, ridge gourd and maize in our fields. Among them which belongs to pulse seeds and non-pulse seeds..."

The next day, I gave note books and white papers and said, "Now we are going to prepare a book on Pulse seeds and Non-Pulse seeds. You

will be divided into two groups, one group has to write your observations on pulse seeds and the other group has to note down their observations on non-pulse seeds. And then everyone of you has to write essays on pulse and non-pulse seed plants. And then you have to draw pictures of plants and seed growing..."

Children dispersed again and did their job. With their essays and pictures I prepared a book on Pulse seeds and Non-Pulse seeds.

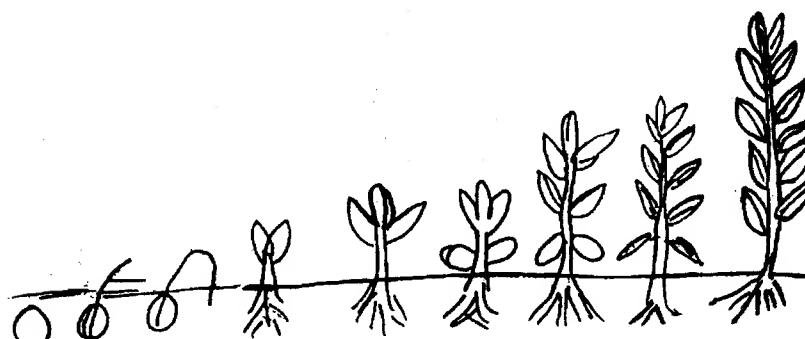
A general introduction of Non-Pulse seeds written by children:

"These are generally called as grass plants. These have nodes. Roots are like fibres. The stem is very lean and short. They are very frail. These plants give ear-heads. Leaves are long. When the seeds germinate, the seed will not come out. The seed has no pulses... Non-Pulse seeds are: paddy, maize, millets. They have a short life period. These plants have no branches"

Hemalatha notes her observations on Ragi:

"We can easily pluck this plant. It is not strong. It will not live for a long time. This plant is like a big grass plant. The leaves of this plant are lean and long! This is a short plant. The bunch of flowers having black and white colours. With ragi, people prepare ragimalt..."

Learning should be encouraged in a natural process. Children need not by-heart the terminology of the text books! It is very difficult to the 8-10 year old children!



If we provide opportunity to develop their natural curiosity, observation and creative potentialities and encourage them to express themselves in their own known language, children can certainly develop their memory power and respond spontaneously. With this experience I strongly believe, that children are my teachers, they can teach to the teachers. The only issue before us is that we have to enter into their world.

No Alternatives to First Hand Experiences, it Seems!

I made my group of 8 year old children sow all the maize seeds on the same day in the same way in the same type of soil. After about 8 days, the maize germinated.

On that day, when the sprouts came out of the soil, I gave all the children, straight strong sticks, and instructed them to fix them besides the sprouts and observe the growth of their plant every day.

For the first ten days they observed the plant growth regularly. Then after every 15 days they recorded the growth of their plant. This process made them curious in the first ten days. After measuring, they would rush to tell me their findings.

"Anna! My plant has grown only half c.m..." Malli informed.

"Anna! Our plants have grown one and half centimetres..." informed Mastan and Nagaraju, with pride.

Mallikarjuna said with a pathetic face, "My plant has not grown even one centimetre..." I raised a doubt, "We have sown all seeds on the same day, and all germinated the same day. Then why is this difference in the plant growth?"

Everybody started thinking deeply. I enquired further, "Are your plants getting sufficient water? Is the land wet or not? And can you tell me where your plants are located?" and the like... Children inspected the land and came back.

Malli told with a sad voice, "Anna! The soil is not wet enough near my plant." Mallikarjuna and Ravi selected the maize plants which are growing under the shade of tamarind trees. Mastan, Vijaya, Narayana and Jyothi selected those getting sufficient air, water and sunlight!

"So, we have learned that water is necessary for the growth of plants... Plants cannot grow under the shade..."

All this they learned through active participation and experience!

Thereafter, along with our agricultural labourer, Narasimhulu, we all worked hard in the fields. We watered the plants, weeded, nurtured it with fertilizers, drove away the birds which tried to eat the corn, observed and recorded the plant growth, the flowering, the transformation of flowers into fruits, the seed which are hidden inside the fruits, we tasted the baby corns, we had ladies finger and ridge gourd curry for our food. As a result of all this, we have learned different subjects while we worked and enjoyed.

Many things came into our experience during the three months of the crop! Every issue struck our minds and made interesting study! We recorded every observation in a table during this period. Based on that table we again learned science and mathematics.

Along with this we learned about fertilizers, pesticides, pests, plant diseases, worms, birds, animals like squirrels and rats which do harm to the crops, and about thieves who steal the corn in the dark!!

Implicit in this is the philosophy of Botany and Zoology, Physics and Chemistry!! However, most important learning that remains without being focussed, yet needs a lot of attention is the relationship between Nature and the living beings!

Thus if the school has a small piece of land for agriculture, whether the school may be self-reliant or not, we can create several ways of using it innovatively. We can have extraordinary experiences through it, which no books can satisfy! So, can we make our teaching alive?

FARM OBSERVATION SHEET											
Date of Sowing	Acr age	Date of Sprouts Came	Plant Growth - Height					Dates on Watering	Dates of Rainfall	Dates of Flowing	
			Day 1	Day 5	Day 10	Day 15	Day 30				
Maize 6.88	1 Acre 20 Cents	3.7.88	1 cm	10 cm	13 cm			6 Feet	29.6.88 2.7.88 13.7.88 2.8.88 13.8.88 22.8.88 26.8.88 8.9.88 15.9.88	7.7.88 16.7.88 21.7.88 22.7.88 15.8.88 23.8.88 15.8.88 23.8.88 15.9.88	2nd week of August
Dates of Weeding	Dates that Fertiliser Given	Dates that Pesticides Sprayed	Size of Corn	Period of Crop	Total Income on the Crop	Observations					
11.7.88 12.7.88	13.7.88 2.8.88	in the begin	30 cm	3 Months	Rs. 2,100/-	* Pulseless Seed * Squirrels spoiled Sprout					

Crops in Pallipadu - a First Hand Account

Jyothi walked through the field, balancing along one of the bunds and holding a questionnaire in her hand. Kavitha followed her, always fearful that she might fall! I walked behind, and after me came Narayana loudly singing "drama poems". He too had a questionnaire.

I stopped him, "We are going on some work. People may or may not answer our queries. Sometimes they may be hesitant, or even angry. We have to approach them carefully, say that we want to learn a few things from them, and ask if they would kindly answer our questions. If you sing like this, I doubt if anyone will cooperate with us!" Narayana was a persistent and independent boy, who preferred to work alone.

As part of environmental studies, we had prepared questionnaires to provide an opportunity for the children to study at first hand the various crops cultivated in their village. The children were divided into pairs, and each pair had one questionnaire. They were asked to visit different farms and interview the farmers or any workers available on the farm. Every questionnaire included space for answers as well. One child was supposed to ask the questions while the other wrote them down in the space provided.

Jyothi and Kavitha turned into a brinjal field. I followed them. Narayana went on towards a betelnut field. The farmer was working in the brinjal field. Jyothi introduced herself and explained her task, but the farmer did not care to respond.



CROPS IN PALLIPADU

He continued with his work. The girls looked at each other and then turned towards me. I refused to help them. Again, Jyothi asked the farmer if he would answer her questions. He answered, without stopping his work, "If I sit with you to chit chat, who will do my work? Go on, ask..."

Jyothi read out the question, and the farmer answered, without looking up from his work.

"Anna! Which soils are good for these brinjals?" asked Jyothi. "You can grow brinjals anywhere, as long as there is not stagnant water," he answered.

Kavitha sat on the bund and started writing the answers. After she had finished, Jyothi asked the next question. "Which pests attack the crop?" He listed the pests affecting the crop, using local terms.

The interview started with some fear and hesitation, but at the end they had obtained all the information they wanted about the crop. After completing the interview, the children thanked the farmer and returned to school.

All the children visited different fields, interviewed the farmers and collected information on paddy, cotton, maize, millet, ladies finger, etc.

A few farmers did not cooperate with the children. Some gave very brief but concise answers; while others responded very well, giving children additional information. Some children like Kristayya, did not visit any field, but just sat under a tree and filled the questionnaire without interviewing the farmers!

The children thoroughly enjoyed this exercise. Going out of the school, meeting different types of people and interviewing them not only aroused their interest but also provided an opportunity for them to learn the skill of interviewing. We allotted two periods a week for this activity. Children conducted interviews to collect information not only on crops, but about the village as well.

Children do not like to sit for hours together in one place. They like to move, quarrel, tease, fight... This exercise provided an excellent outlet

for their energy. They walked on the bunds, on the roads, ate corn and millet and sugarcane right off the fields... They enjoyed the freedom and independence it gave them. We think that this is the first step towards moulding their characters!

When the children returned from their investigations, wide-eyed, they recounted their experiences, obviously excited about what they had learned. Later, they collated the information during their science classes and prepared reports on various crops. Santha, Vijaya and Hemalatha wrote this essay on the brinjal crop:

“This crop will be grown whenever the season is favourable. It can be grown anywhere. It needs less water. Crop comes to fruit within 45 days. Plants germinate after 5 days of sowing. They transplant the younger plants in the fields. Plants will be watered once in every 10 days. During the germination gamaxin and sevin will be applied. Squirrels spoil the crop. Yellow worms and pests attack this crop. So, endrin, rogor, ecalux, parathene, etc. pesticides will be sprayed on crop. For better growth manure, CN, Urea, etc. fertilizers can be used. The fertilizer can be given once in 15 days...”

Children are unlikely to forget things they learn as a result of their own exploration. It is often a torment for the normal school child to learn by rote dozens of theorems and facts within the four walls of the classroom. Moreover, they generally learn far-removed facts about Africa or the Mediterranean!! They do not know how to draw a map of their village but have been forced to memorise the borders of Akbar’s kingdom!

Today, how many schools provide children an opportunity to observe the world beyond their school? How many schools teach their children by allowing them to touch, smell, hear and experience?

Subject	Objectives to Teach	Activities by Students	Expected outcome from Students	Expected outcome from Students
Language Literature	Develop consciousness on speaking local language	Collect folk songs, stories, riddles, proverbs etc.	Prepare books on folk songs, folk stories of Nellore, Medak and Anantapur districts	Prepare readers on classical literature; Traditional poetry; Modern poetry; short stories reflecting agriculture & rural environment
	Know differences between spoken and standard languages	Collect words used in agricultural field	Prepare “Agriculture Dictionary”	
	Develop poetic expression and aesthetic sense	Dramatise dramas from classical & folk literatures		Develop subtle feelings and responsible attitude towards environment/ Nature Identification with rural culture through Bhagotham etc. Discuss and understand Social disparities

History	Compare present day agriculture with olden days; evolution of agriculture from ancient	Interviewing farmers; Referring books	Prepare books on Agriculture of olden days; Present day agricultural practices	Prepare readers on Agricultural History; Histories of Nellore, Medak, Anantapur districts
Civics	Develop abilities to refer books and interview	Collect and make albums with pictures photos of tribal agriculture, impliments.	Prepare book on "Our Gramapanchayat"	
Geography	Deveop awareness on village administration	Interviewing persons/surpanch /Ward members	Skills in map pointing	Prepare readers on Globe; My village to the word; District geography of Nellore/ Medak/Anantapur
	Develop skills in using globe and atlas	Using Globe and atlas Draw maps	Prepare a book with maps of the district	
	Develop abilities to gather information from various sources	Collect soils, stones, sattelite pictures. Note temperature, rainfall etc.,	Prepare a book on impliments	
Physics	To understand scientific laws behind impliments Develop skills in handling impliments	Draw pictures of impliments	Prepare a book on "impliments"	

Chemistry	Discuss on fertilisers, pesticides, herbal pesticides, soil fertility, etc.	Make compost pits & prepare compost Make warmy culture prepare herbal pesticides	Prepare books on Compost: Warmy culture; Neem solution	
Zoology	Understand the integral role on insects, birds & animals	Record observation through observation sheets Draw Pictures of birds/animals Collect information on pest control	Prepare books on "Pests and their control"; Birds	
Botany	Get an exposure to diversified life cycle Observe environmental changes Understand importance of trees	sow, weed harvest.... Record observations Make harberium Collect seeds barks etc.	Skills in slowing, weeding harvesting etc., Preparing books on "Plant growth"; Our crops; Needy weather conditions for plant survival	Prepare readers on Photosynthesis; "The Leaf"; "Food pyramid"

Mathematics	link mathematical concepts to farm based activities Understand rationality and logic behind the environmental things	Note and measure the land, classrooms, rainfall, temperature etc., based on observation sheets	Prepare a reader on "Permaculture
Sociology	Understand social structures and aware on social disparities	Interviewing persons Refer Refer books	Prepare readers on Dalits & their status;
Culture	Understand whole agricultural phylosophy Develop abilities in documentation	Interviewing persons Documenting by photos, audio cassettes Prepare posters Celebrate festivals in school	Prepare Photo features Prepare readers on cultural practises of Nellore, Medak, Anantapur districts
Bio-Diversity	Aware and train students in diversified agricultural systems	Practice permaculture Visit other farms	Prepare a book on "Bio-diversity"
Arts and	Develop imaginative creative expression	Draw pictures, paintings Make clay models etc.	Prepare readers on Permaculture; Natural farming

**our environment is
our text book**

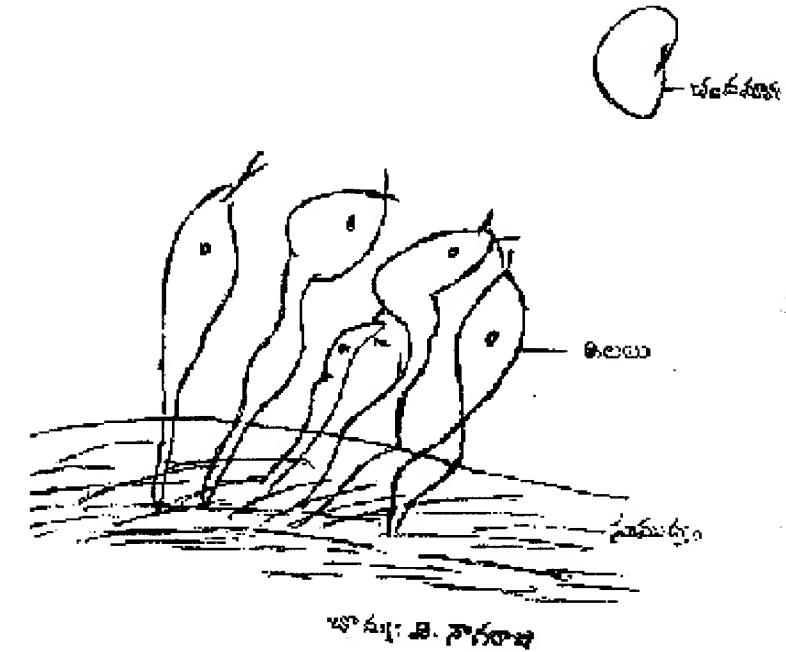
Knowing Oneself

education is not only learning about academic subjects, but to educate oneself

- J. Krishna Murthy
"Letters to Schools - 2"

Krishna Murthy says that learning not only subjects like English, Science, Mathematics, but also learning about himself is real education. *Vid* means *to know*. Two things are here. One is to know about his physical structure, his behaviour, his attitudes, his feelings and relationships with others. And the second is to know about the roots of "I" ... I did, I ate, I wrote, I achieved, I learnt... Without this "I" our work is not fulfilling. So real education should help the child to know the roots of "I".

I always remained a student even while I was teaching children or training teachers. After all, what is there to teach after ensuring a free atmosphere? And after piling up the questions, I usually left it to the children and teacher trainees to discuss. With the raised voices, exhibiting their emotion, the students and teacher trainees both alike indulged in debates; dug deep into the well of their experiences and thus enlivened the proceedings. Debates usually end up



with solutions but sometimes they conclude unsuccessfully. The students arrive at mutual conciliation and sometimes even tears are shed in the classroom. They felt guilty for their unreasonableness. Except the maths period, all the other periods of Telugu, Science, remotely resembled the traditional classes. Had any one witnessed and heard the noise, he would have wondered whether it was a school or a village fair. Though the 'lesson' formed the raw material, the lively and vociferous discussions on the same bring out the child's inner feelings, his character, his surprising capacity to evaluate himself and the probing into his own behaviour... all these combined to assert a feeling. If this were not true education, what else is?

Congenial atmosphere of the school, homely relations, the scope for discussion towards mutual understanding... all these helped children to introspect themselves and develop further.

Right Education

by watching, perhaps you learn more than from books... what you are, how you behave, why you get angry, envious, why you get depressed... if you watch yourself, you learn much more than from a book that tells you what you are.

- J. Krishna Murthy

"Letters to Schools - 2"

Real education is not drawn by reading a few books, but will be drawn by observing the surroundings and by experience. Moreover, very important is *Watching Oneself...* How are one's thoughts, why one is hopeful or depressed or angry, how the selfishness, fear, desire are developing in oneself... The real education will help the child to watch his/ her own psychological aspects.

In order to check the behaviour, anger and to observe their desires and aspirations, we pursued many methods. Some clicked. Some didn't. Any change among the children was as scarce as rain in summer. Was the objective *to observe* meant to *change*? This has remained an eternal question for me.

Children quarrelled. Boys teased the girls. They abused each other after the name of their castes. Trifles led to scuffles. They shun their duties and responsibilities. They indulged in wastage. Srujana school consisted of all kinds of children with contrasting psychological complexes viz., stubborn like Narayana, bold like Jaya, shy like Chinna Nagaraju, solitary like Sudhir, domineering like Mastan, work-prone like Jungli, sensitive like Vijaya.

Assembly meetings helped to analyse the merits and demerits of the children. The growing *jealousy* and *selfishness* were often the topics in those meetings. Children confessed to their faults quite honestly but it did not help them change their habits later. Same old habits got repeated... the nuisance, the noise and petty accusations...!

Narayana was mischievous. As he would chirp and sing the poems and film songs by the fields, the farmers scold him. Jyothi, Kavitha though initially afraid, overcame that complex gradually. They even brought unsought information. Thereby, their power of observation improved. Mastan, Mallikarjuna were intelligent but too inactive to take any risks. They collect superficial information and rub off their hands. Kristaiah was too indolent to even go out. He wrote answers by himself.

The information they brought, their experiences while collecting it formed part of the discussions. They come out with their phobias, admit their laziness and confess the petty thefts they committed. These helped children for better understanding of their own behaviour and for the teachers to assess their pupils.

Diary writing was important of all activities. Students wrote all the happenings of the day at school and home. Teachers alone read those diaries. Children related their sensitive relationship with their parents, with their friends and their fears, joys, their sufferings and expressed the same very sensitively in their diaries. The diaries of Vijaya, Sudhir, Ravi, Nagaraju, etc. spoke of many social and economic conditions. Vijaya's diary was full of pathos.

It contributed towards questioning themselves and thereby helped to improve further. Regarding any change in them, well - we thought we had sown the seeds and in time they would sprout and bloom.

Right Climate

the purpose, the aim and drive of these schools is to equip the child with the most excellent technological proficiency, so that he may function with clarity and efficiency in the modern world and far more important to create the right climate, so that the child may develop fully as a complete human being.

- J. Krishna Murthy

"On Education"

Children understand themselves well in a proper atmosphere. There, they would grow into complete human beings.

Both the schools I worked with were amidst the fields, away from the villages. Gardens, farms, hedges, spacious class rooms, decently equipped libraries, cooperating staff... With all these what an extraordinary and wonderful experience it was to run a school for kids!

In the earlier days at Pallipadu, we conducted the classes for children under the trees. They would listen to the teaching and side by side, along with their teacher observe their surroundings... squirrels chasing one another, the falling of the leaves. They also listened to the music of the birds like Cuckoo, labourer in the fields nearby, etc. The main gain was that children felt at ease and were at full liberty. The unease present within the four walls of a class room was absent under the trees. There were usual murmuring, teasing, and name-calling among the students. But what was important, they would raise any doubts they get from observing their surroundings. Their queries were answered. ***The surroundings, became our textbook***, as it were. We, likewise, learned the reasons behind the cry of the baby-owls and fed our brains with much more of chameleons and lizards.

It is hard to define the term 'attention'. Mallikarjuna was restless in the class... changing places, pulling the hair of someone, poking others with his pen! Sometimes, he would sit calmly and look into the fields, unmindful of everything around him. More than once, I would stop in the middle of my teaching and would ask him to repeat the last thing I spoke or else I would put him one or two questions on the lesson. Surprisingly, he gave the answers without much fuss. Moving here and there, teasing someone or other, looking sideways inattentively, yet he was listening to what I was teaching. How could he do it? What was his mental state? It remained a puzzle for me. Sudhir and Vijaya always appeared attentive, fixing their eyes upon the teacher. And if we justly call it *attention*, how about Mallikarjuna?

From this, I reasoned that though students seem inattentive, given a

natural setting and sufficient freedom, somewhere their senses perceive the essence of what they hear.

The foremost thing I observed of ***classroom decoration*** work was that the reading capacity of the children doubled. It also brought remarkable change in the children's nature. But as usual, while the boys escaped the work, the girls showed more enthusiasm for it. While children owned up to what they did and how they did... showing to each other and criticizing each other's work, I had noticed some kind of inferiority complex among a few. But I never worked on such aspects. However, general mirth and laughter in the classroom covered everything.

Children like learning while they work. Amidst all the complaints and the usual noise, children were very eager to work with their hands. Instead of the normal lecturing of the lesson we had chosen certain projects which require work and which stimulate their brains.

They learned quickly and read and wrote a lot faster, but what was of significance, their interests were uncovered... Vijaya as a writer; Nagaraju as an artist; Mallikarjuna's penchant for science experiments; Jaya and Jungli's bent for manual labour; Mastan's organising skills... All these were discovered and accordingly strengthened with individual attention. Such projects cemented further the teacher-student relationships. We all came closer as brothers and sisters.

Giving freedom to children for creating a proper atmosphere is a very important aspect. Instead of adhering to the usual traditional roles of a teacher and a student, we developed a good rapport with children. In the utter absence of any disciplinary atmosphere, the teacher's honesty to learn along with the students had contributed towards their independent thinking. It gave a fillip to their observation and aroused their curiosity. I did misuse this freedom once. I couldn't control myself and had scolded and beat a child. Hence, I took to fasting that day.

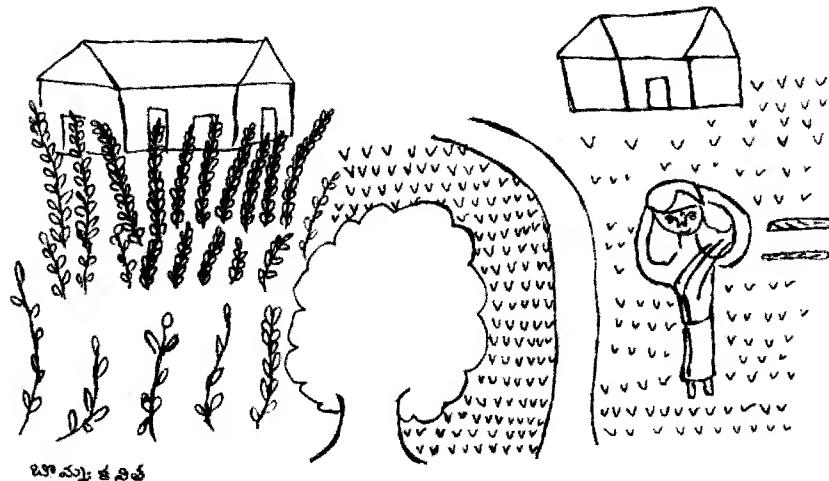
We were sure we had created a right climate to uncover their interests and accordingly their development. Our efforts for a child's complete flowering of his individuality remained ceaseless.

Establishing Goodness

when we talk about a total human being, we mean not only a human being with inward understanding, with a capacity to explore, to examine his inward being, in inward state and the capacity of going beyond it, but also someone who is good in what he does outwardly, the two must go together. that is the real issue in education... to see that when the child leaves the school, he is well established in goodness, both outwardly and inwardly.

- J. Krishna Murthy
“On Education”

Is it possible to create opportunities for the children to transform themselves as persons, both within and without? Is this at all possible for any teacher? It is, no doubt, possible to encourage and inspire children to become good poets, artists, actors, scientists, mathematicians, technical experts and one can succeed with a lot of effort. But, is it possible to make the children as true, good and beautiful persons, both internally and externally, when they leave the school?



The social and economic conditions of the parents have great influence upon their children. Their respective religious faiths and caste restrictions were quite predominant.

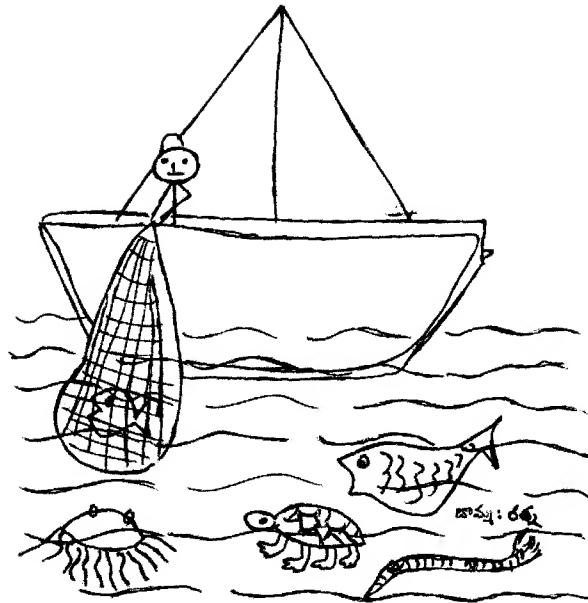
Every day, towards the conclusion of the assembly session, meditation was compulsory. Likewise, once or twice in a week, we used to sit in meditation in the twilight. Most of the inmates took it seriously. Jungli, Mastan, Narayana, etc. coughed, sneezed and produced unwarranted sounds to disturb the meditation. I simply told them to observe their thoughts calmly, whether they believed in God or not. Children like Jyothi wanted to chant *Om*. I agreed, for I never opposed their beliefs. At those moments, Mastan and Jungli used to stir uncomfortably. They couldn't sit calmly and observe their thoughts even. They were aged only ten. Yet how conscious they are about their religious beliefs? How is this problem to be solved sensitively?

I once took the children for a visit to the graves of religious heads. Children went down the steps of the temple well and washed their feet. But two children who were aged seven or so stood at the edge of the well. I told them to wash their feet in the well. They blushed and refused. They belonged to the lower castes (Dalits). I persuaded them much but they wouldn't listen. A seven year old boy was so conscious of his caste and custom! Without first solving this problem of caste and religion disparities, how to develop goodness among the children, both outside and inside of them?

always told children to meditate for a while before undertaking any work. Vijaya, Jyothi, Sudhir, Ravi followed my advice. The rest didn't get used to it.

Many a time we discussed to develop compassion for our fellow beings - animals, birds, trees alike. The stories of Buddha, Jesus were constantly narrated to the children. But to what avail? When the tamarind trees were in full bloom, children, because of their inability to climb, threw stones for the fruit. It pained me. During the assembly, I exhorted the children not to throw stones at the trees.

Social Situation



The point was that there were groups among the students. Mastan group; Jaya group; Narayana group, etc. There were a few like Sudhir, Nagaraju who were unattached and did not belong to any group. Grouping was rampant at the time of fruit distribution, each group ignoring the other groups. Children like Sudhir, being inactive, remained as mere spectators in the entire exercise.

No amount of persuasion either by pointing out their mistakes or by narrating of the stories produced any effect on the children. I always thought how finer human qualities like compassion, goodness, modesty, intelligence be developed among the children.

my students and my children have to face the world which is everything other than intelligence and love. this is not a cynical statement, but it is so, palpable and evident. they have to face corruption, brutality and utter callousness. they are frightened. being responsible (i am using that word carefully, and with deep intention) how are we to help them to face all this?

- J. Krishna Murthy
"Letters to Schools - 2"

To say the truth, children lived in an unbearable social setup. My pupils were socially and economically backward. Some were Dalits, some belonged to lower castes. Their fathers came drunk in the evenings and beat their mothers. They swore against each other on the streets. Children grew amidst such an horrific atmosphere. The fathers included not only the decent and the respectable but also the disreputable like thieves and goondas. Majority of the parents were daily wage earners. Hence, before and after the school, children's participation in their respective occupations was compulsory. Vijaya went to the river and helped her parents in washing the clothes. Jaya and Malli looked after the cattle. Jyothi assisted in the agricultural works. Nagaraju accompanied his brother to the city to sell milk. Santha helped her mother in the hotel. How much of love and affection they received at home was not known but all the children, irrespective of their sex, assisted in their household works.

Children stopped altogether coming to the school in the harvest season and instead went to the fields to pluck groundnuts or cotton.

Our boys were very conscious of their poverty and of their social standing. They very much knew their limits in spite of the detailed discussions at school about their social and economic conditions. Though full of

dynamism and nationality, they never wrangled crossing their caste restrictions. It was true that they grew increasingly inquisitive and sharpened their observatory powers and at times defied their parents. Yet, their diaries revealed that they perfectly understood their position.

Saturday Seminars were only for few minutes, sometimes breeding boredom. At times, they extended for an hour and above. Children, more than the elders were passionate and vociferous in their expression on such topics as superstitions, etc. I still remember their voices.

Apart from the above activities, children got some opportunities where they exhibited their boldness and firmness. For example, a peasant cut down a tree within the premises of the school. Children collectively opposed it and complained to the village sarpanch. Such incidents were numerous. The theories learned at school helped them to learn many social realities.

Collective Efforts

discipline really means to learn not to bow down to a standard; from childhood we are told to mould ourselves according to a religious or social structure, to control ourselves to obey. discipline is based on reward and punishment. discipline is inherent in every subject: if you want to be a good golfer or tennis player, it demands that you pay attention to every stroke, to respond quickly and gracefully. the very game has its intrinsic natural order. this instructive order has gone out of our life, which has become chaotic, ruthless, competitive, seeking power with all it's pleasures. discipline implies, does it not, learning the whole complex movement of life social, personal and beyond personal?

- J. Krishna Murthy
"Letters to Schools - 2"

To define the term 'discipline' is a difficult task. I never observed any discipline for myself at school. Children too were never taught of it. Hence, they discounted me totally and virtually rode upon me. They were never afraid of me. But, whenever a new teaching project was taken up, children always willingly lent their help. They laboured in the hot sun with undiminished enthusiasm. Children enjoyed full freedom in all my classes. They never sat at one place. I scarcely chided them for any mischief. When they made noise, I fell into a reverie searching for the causes behind their behaviour. Poor children came to the school with empty stomach. How could they listen to the teacher attentively?

The necessity of enforcing discipline hardly arises if the students are given active roles in what they learn, be it language or arts & crafts. They learned collectively and it gave them immense pleasure.

Co-teacher Rama followed a different approach from mine in controlling the children. A few signs and gestures with her eyes were enough to make them calm. After all, each one has his own method.

Barring one or two children, everyone showed keen enthusiasm for manual labour. They were quite content to work amidst jokes. They washed and cleaned the school. They undertook the digging of pits. They carried the sand to places with ease.

Each student was allotted a 10x10 feet area of land to cultivate vegetables and flowers. Watering, weeding formed part of their daily activities. If they came with empty stomachs and in times of their indifferent moods, they gave excuses. But, all in all, the work went on smoothly. If there was any distance between the children and myself, it was soon reduced.

Instead of a teacher, I became a brother to them. They were never taught of discipline and I used to ponder at times as to what and who guided them as we didn't give any incentives to them.

Teacher's responsibility is just to provide the means and opportunities for the children to learn. One cannot teach discipline, attention to them. I waited patiently for these qualities to flower among the children. At length, I perceived a change in them though I was not sure as to whom or what I should give credit to.

making alternatives

Healthy Body for Investigating the Activity of the Mind

To continue my educational experiments, inspiration is drawn from the teachings of J. Krishna Murthy; and later on a flavour is taken from the teachings of Gowthama the Buddha. Here I would like to share my experiences on the physical development of the school children, without philosophizing, conceptualizing or theorizing.

J. Krishna Murthy pays more attention to explore the activity of the mind, along with the development of the body. At the ripened age he used to continue practice of Yogasanas. It was luck to watch him closely, when he walks with straight body and the way he sat on the floor with crossed legs. Healthy body only co-operates to investigate the activity of the mind... This is his message!

Gowthama the Buddha also gave more importance to the body. Whatever arises in the mind, it will express on the body through "sensation". If anger arises in the mind, immediately one can experience burning sensation in the body and change in breath, which leads to tension! Similarly, if satisfaction arises in the mind, one can experience pleasant sensations throughout the body and get relaxed! So, Buddha



suggests meditators to be in contact with the bodily sensations till one gets *Nibbana* state (Enlightenment). According to him it is important to understand the relationship between the mind and the matter! So, there should be no negligence in developing the physical structure of the children.

My school children were SCs, BCs and one girl was from ST family, between 5 to 11 years of age. All were from rural areas. When they were admitted into my school "Chitti Badi", near Anantapur town, all most all children were suffering with different diseases because of malnutrition, no parental care, hard work as child labourers in the fields or grazing animals under the hot sun or doing household duties, etc.

Skin diseases like scabies, ringworm, lice, dandruff, white spots at the end of mouth, etc. were common. Siva had reddish spots on the face, on both arms and on both legs. Babu stammered and was very slow learner! Sucharita from ST family was a mad and ugly girl. She was squint eyed, hunchbacked, stammering girl! Her hair was erect like needles. She was red in colour. Dark red and yellow spots were on her entire body. Ramanjaneyulu was anaemic, very lean and used to cough now and then. Children informed me that they used to take bath once in a week and once in four or five months boys used to cut their hair... Every child has some health problem.

Economically they all were poor. Socially they belong to lower castes, who do not have enough and satisfactory facilities and suffering with diseases, superstitions, tradition and customs. The continuous drought and famine conditions, common in drought prone area, disturbs their education and forcibly put them in labour work and when their parents migrate they remain in villages like orphans!

Culturally they had their own beliefs. They gave more importance to their village deities, and used to celebrate animal festivals, festivals belongs to agriculture. Manjunath was a Lingayat (belongs to Siva cult of Basavanna), gave importance to Lord Shiva, very strong in his religious beliefs.

These children were gifted to me. They allowed me to practice equanimity, tolerance in all situations and to find some alternative for their learning!

The children with some spiritual base should be given equal opportunities

to prepare themselves to be *integrated human beings* with full freedom and responsibilities.

Along with providing nutritious food and academic exercises in classroom, children used to practice the following everyday:

1. *Physical exercises and Yogasanas*: Every day before starting the school, between 8 to 9 a.m., children practiced *yogasanas*. I taught nearly 25 standing, sitting and lying *asanas* along with observing respiration. All these *asanas* gave good exercise to backbone, neck, waist, chest and fingers! These brought changes in the body, as well as developed mental concentration.

2. *Sports and games*: Chitti Badi was not in a position to appoint a teacher for physical education. I just provided ordinary balls, rings and volley ball without net. Children dug a pit in the ground and filled with sand, then used it for long jump and high jump. They used to play Kabaddi, Kho-kho also. I made 15 feet wide road from the main gate to the classroom, I asked them to run on this track every day. I gave a large bamboo to play like Javelin throw. There was no professional coaching, but children used to just play and enjoy. I gave chess board to play in leisure timings.

3. *Manual work (Garden work)*: The school was in 6 acres of agricultural land. I gave every child 5x5 feet piece of land near classrooms and 10 varieties of seeds to grow vegetable plants... They prepared the land, made rows, added manure, fenced the area, etc. The hand pump near the main gate is one and half furlongs away from the class rooms. Children were given buckets. They pumped, carried and gave water to their vegetable plants. It became a very good physical exercise. I linked this exercise to the academic development. I prepared *observation sheets* and gave them to observe and record the growth in plants.

I brought 750 saplings of various fruit trees to plant in the school farm. Workers prepared pits and planted saplings. Children were divided into 3 groups. One group pumped the water, second group carried the water upto some extent and the third group watered. Every day these responsibilities were rotated.

During the season we had groundnut crop with red gram, green gram, etc. as intercrops. Children were involved in weeding and harvesting! After harvesting we did not buy groundnuts and red gram for five months.

Children were very kind towards me. There is no language to describe their co-operation. They enjoyed all these activities and really worked hard. At the end they were benefitted both at physical and academic levels!

4. *Evening walks*: Every evening, after completion of manual work (i.e. garden work) and games children used to take bath at the hand pump. Then they used to go for a walk. Sometimes I too used to accompany, sometimes they went in groups or in pairs. Normally they took a walk in the fields; on the tank bund; on the road going towards the town. During these walks when they walk in nature not only observing the nature around the school but also, while returning back they used to bring vegetable leaves or raw fruits which only grow in fields as weed plants for their dinner! When they walk in the village, they used to buy sweets in a village shop and eat. They used to gather news of the village. After returning to the school they used to discuss this in detail.

5. *Meditation*: After practicing *asanas*, we used to meditate for 15 minutes. In this children practised to observe the natural breath as it is. Naturally thoughts will disturb and children will miss observing the breath. Between two thoughts there would be few quiet moments, which will play very important role in preparing to know oneself! I asked children to sit quietly and enjoy that *state of silence within* from few moments to one minute. This deep meditation (*samadhi* - concentration) helped children to develop their I.Q. rapidly!

After 10 months, when I assessed children not only in academics; arts & crafts, but also in their physical development, I started loving all those little Buddhas, including Sucharita, the mad and ugly girl!

Here I am not feeling shy to write and not exaggerating, but it is reality. I was tempted many a times to kiss Siva and Ramanjaneyulu and the mad girl Sucharita, who first gave lots of troubles to us, but became a wise girl!

After 10 months, all children came out from their previous diseases, including Sucharita... No skin diseases. No psychological fears... When Ramanjaneyulu was admitted into the school then everybody used to count his ribs. Children called him with nick name. But soon he picked up, developed good muscle and became the leader of the school. Even I used to take his opinions. The spots on Siva's body disappeared and he became a good handsome boy. Like this all children improved their health; got good colour, fairness and charming physical appearance!

Not only in physical appearances, in deep psychological layers, "*the true change*" started in those children. Sucharita used to come early, sweep the entire school compound. She alone would fetch drinking water from the borewell, clean and keep all the school material such as globe, flower vases, etc. in their respective places neatly. She used to come with a neat dress after taking bath and with combed hair! Babu, one of the dull students, did not pick up much in studies, but he became a good cook! Siva started giving touches to the "artist" inside him! He made crayon paintings on drought of Anantapur district, which reflected the misery of the dryland farmers! Ramanjaneyulu who was a good story teller, became a good story writer. Sucharita started painting beautiful pictures from her inner world!

Manjunath had strong beliefs in his religious practices. When we have taken up teaching projects on Moharram and Christmas he strongly opposed! Except Lord Shiva, he didn't want to pay respects to other religious gods and saints! During Christmas he didn't make the clay models of Christ, didn't lit the candles, didn't eat the cake, didn't want to listen words from the Bible... He boycotted the entire teaching project for two days, he did fasting for those two days!! He got a fear that if he prays gods of other religions, his God Shiva will punish him! It took a long time to make him understand about the cultural harmony!

In the beginning children used to tease Sucharita, as she was mad! She also used to tear their note books, break the slates, etc. She also used to beat, bite, pull the heads of other children. I asked other children to show patience and kindness on her. Slowly, in five to six months she started changing!

Awareness on Their Environment and Lives

Vannuru Swamy is a 13 year old boy, failed two times in 5th class. So his parents were disappointed and did not send him to the school. He was disinterested and not capable to read and write!

Hanumanthu's parents had a loan, so, to repay it he is working as a partially paid servant in one of the farmer's house.

Because of early marriage at 12 years, Jayalaxmi dropped out from the school.

Because of some chronic disease, Marennna was irregular to school and continuously failed 4th class 4 times. His parents are poor and superstitions. They offered animal sacrifices to the local deity to cure the boy's ill-health!

Subbamma knew reading and writing, and was good in studies. But her parents put her to cook and to look after the kids and the house. So she dropped out!

To find alternative steps for dropout children one has to discuss the reasons for the problem - why students drop out?

There are several socio-economic reasons like early marriages, illiteracy of parents, domination of upper castes in villages, superstitions, poverty, untouchability, political suppression, unemployment, social disparities, child labour, bonded labour, migration, lack of nutritive food, etc.

When I joined in Rural Development Trust (RDT) as a teacher trainer, the task given to me was to improve standards of the SC (dalit), ST and BC children in RDT schools.

Teachers informed that motivating parents is very hard task. Parents are not interested and would not like to send their children to schools and get proper education, particularly girl children! Children once dropped out; do not pay sufficient interest to attend the school and to learn! In

many villages, where a voluntary organisation is working, volunteers are taking responsibility to pick-up children before the school and to leave them at their houses after the school! Parents also demand that it is the volunteer's responsibility to pickup and then leave the children at their homes! Volunteers are feeling difficulty to convince SC parents to send their children to schools! And they found that strong beliefs and superstitions are preventing parents to send girl children to school! There are parents who seek benefits like clothes, medicines, books, some kind of food, etc. if they send their children to school!

In every class the standard of the children varies greatly. Though many children are studying 5th class, they do not even know the alphabet! A few learned upto vowel syllables only! Very weak in mathematics! Year after year they are promoted to higher classes, but actually, they don't have real standard! That means these children are not able to compete with the syllabus as per their age! Many children are attending irregularly... perhaps, children absent during the agricultural season to earn some money and support their families or disinterested to sit within four walls and learn! In many villages, the school is away from the village, particularly from SC colony!

Along with these reasons, teachers expressed their observations which are related to academics. One of the main observation is that the government teachers are not taking responsibility towards improving academic standard of the students. All most all government teachers are not staying in villages of their work. So, most of the teachers are irregular to their duties, not accountable to the community or parents. Most of the students have utmost fear about teachers. There is no proper guidance, encouragement to the children from the teachers. There is no proper care and follow-up on irregular children and slow learners. In many schools the ratio between teachers and students is not good. Sufficient teachers are not available in many high schools and some teachers are teaching more than two subjects, irrespective of their qualification! Lack of co-curricular activities, no discipline, lack of facilities and no good function of government schools are observed!

The syllabus and the knowledge of students do not coincide; and learning is just one side activity! Understanding capacity of the children is low. For instance, though students are in the 5th class, actually they cannot read and write their class text-books! Many children of 5th class know only alphabet! Then the method of teaching by the government teachers is bad, not interesting, not responsible and does not create a learning atmosphere in the schools. Actually it is teacher centred teaching method, so it does not bother whether the child has understood or not.

Technical terminology used in text books is difficult to understand and remember. In fact most of those terms are in Sanskrit. For example in environmental sciences, a student of 8 or 9 years has to learn "*eka dala beej*" for monocotyledons, "*Bhugarbha jalam*" for groundwater! Most of the children fail in examinations, getting "0" marks, not able to acquire even a minimum of 35 marks! *No teacher, no parent takes care of dull children, slow learners, and un-intelligent students*. They pay more attention to intelligent students and encourage them. Always slow learners receive discouraging shouts and punishments, will be compared with intelligent students and be advised to change their attitude! Is it possible to change their attitude suddenly, because these children come from oppressed communities, which are for generations deprived of education! The contents of the text books are not relevant to child's environment, child's psychology and to child's life!

After analysing our observations we suggested few alternatives to improve the present situation and provide qualitative education for children:

Teachers should take some responsibility to improve health and hygiene situation in villages. Some relevant content based on their environment should be chalked out and taught to children apart from their text book content. Involve school children now and then to clean village roads, to clean around the wells or hand pumps or the village taps. Take care about the drainage water around the wells and pumps.

Teachers should take some responsibility to reduce illiteracy among the parents by involving school children. Teachers should train children to teach their illiterate parents and other adults in the villages with small

modules, again based on their village atmosphere and monitor with a commitment.

Teachers should take care to avoid child marriages. They have to train school children, particularly above 3rd class children and girl children to understand complications of this social evil! So, a few bad social practises of the villagers should be documented and added along with their text book lessons.

Teachers should organise parent's meetings every month and positively educate them to take care about their children i.e. regularly sending children to the school; maintaining personal hygiene and neatness; taking care to complete home work; to study at home; etc. The teachers should talk to the parents about superstitions; bad social and cultural practises such as child marriages, drinking, etc; not allowing children to do critical labour work, etc.

Teaching should be interesting, qualitative and create enthusiasm to attract children and retain them in the school. For that they have to go little beyond the syllabus and add necessary and relevant awareness topics based on their village environment. With these relevant topics they may quickly learn reading and writing skills and develop some awareness on their environment and their lives, which provide a hope that some change might take place in their lives!

After reviewing the above things, we tried our best to analyse primary school government text books. Telugu text books cover *moral poems and stories; patriotic stories and songs; folk, historical and social stories; letter writing and one or two essays*. Mathematics text books cover *numbers, tables, additions, subtractions, divisions, multiplications, general arithmetic to ratios, place values, etc*. Social studies (environmental sciences -1) text books cover *family, village, eclipses, planets, elections, population, revenue, justice, law, etc*. Natural science (environmental sciences -2) covers *parts of the body, diseases, first aid, construction of houses, tools, nutritive food, air, water, animals, birds, clothes, types of soils, weather, agriculture, life histories of fly and butterfly, etc*.

These seem to be very relevant and appropriate lessons! But in fact, 50% of these lessons are totally irrelevant, not suitable for rural children except to by-heart and memorise! And the major drawback is all most all text books contain *Sanskritised vocabulary with Brahminical orientation* which is irrelevant to dalit children and their culture! For example, there are prayer poems and descriptions about sacred places, rivers and gods... all representing middle class and upper caste culture. The SC and ST children (dalits) by-heart them compulsorily, memorise them to pass examinations and get a certificate.

We cannot go against the current mainstream educational system. But, certainly we can make our own alternative efforts to assist these SC and ST children to some extent. So we removed 50% of the irrelevant lessons in government text books and added our own new lessons which reflect village environment and social issues.

We made Kamala a heroine, around her we developed a story and made our own readers called "Seema Telugu" and "Vekuva". These are readers cum work books, covered Telugu, social, science and mathematics subjects. It reflected local dialect and all exercises were prescribed through play method such as odd one out, jumbled letters, matching, cross words, identifying, blanks, drawing and colouring and role play... Teachers prepared work cards and children played these cards and developed reading and writing abilities in a short period. With the help of this relevant content children quickly picked up and improved their standard appropriate to their class.

In these readers we covered extra, relevant topics on *dowry; child marriages; gender discrimination; drinking liquor; repercussions of gambling; superstitions; illiteracy; untouchability; bonded labour; bad habits; dry land farming; soil conservation; natural resources and protection; growing kitchen gardens; vermicompost; writing application to officers; writing petitions; writing promissory notes; taking care of neatness in surroundings; health; personal hygiene; sanitation; seasonal diseases; first aid; preparing herbal medicines; savings and many other topics*.

Just preparing and teaching relevant topics will not improve the situation, for that one has to re-organise the class room. For class room management we applied “group system”. From 3rd standard to 5th standard children who do not recognise even alphabet or who knew few alphabets were put in “beginners group”. Children who knew few vowel syllables are in second group called “average group”. Children who are good in reading and writing skills are in the third “advanced group”. Teacher paid more attention on beginners group. In other groups clever children helped slow learners and improve their standard.

Certainly there were many difficulties while applying these relevant topics. Even then RDT teachers put all their efforts to go against the stream to educate dalit children and ensured them with a better future! I thank all those teachers and RDT management who tried their best to implement these readers with relevant topics.

District Readers

Education Philosophy suggests to teach starting from the known to unknown. If student understands the basic concepts of his/ her local environment, then automatically he/ she will understand the universal concepts without much difficulty. Unfortunately our present education system is working against this, i.e. teaching starts with unknown things. And a child has to by-heart unknown contents, which directly and indirectly develops stress in their tender minds!

If the student is aware of his/ her local environment, influences of local social, economical and cultural conditions he may develop quick grasping powers; may show a good and satisfactory progress, understanding capabilities and capability of creative expression. The first generation learners of SC, ST and BC community children who are alienated by the upper caste communities from thousands of years, will enjoy the fruits of the education. But, the main objective of the present day education is certainly not to educate these children of the lower communities!! If they are educated they will fight for their rights, so, teaching system starts with unknown factors!

A single teacher of a local school has to teach not less than 100 students and has to teach four to five subjects (Telugu, Mathematics, Social, Science and English) to all 1-5 classes! So, in practice, a teacher of a local school hurried up to complete his syllabus and conduct examinations, whether the students understand or not, he is not able to explain with local examples, as he is not responsible to their pass or failure and as he is not responsible to the local communities! In this worst situation, the first generation learners of SC, ST and BC communities are not able to pick up their learning abilities and always show poor progress.

For example, if one refers Class 3 text books, one can understand the actual learning inputs. Environmental Sciences-1 (social studies) text book covers these contents:

The Earth (Bhoomi); The Planets and the Solar System; Continents and Oceans (world map, globe); The Discovery of Fire (history of early man) (Aadima manav); Invention of the Wheel; Our Country India; Our States; Unity in Diversity; Our State - A.P.; Life and Occupation of the people; Important places and Monuments in Hyderabad; Pondicherry; Our Government (Central or Union Government, State Government: Parliament, Loksabha, Rajyasabha, President, Prime Minister, Council of Ministers, The Courts etc.).

Through these lessons students should learn (by-heart) the following vocabulary, which are Sanskritised terms:

Atmosphere, Ferdinand Magellan a Portuguese Sailor, Voyage, Horizon (Kshitijam), Coast, Planets (Graha), Solar system (Sowra vyavastha), Orbit, Globe, Maps, North and South Poles, Equator, Hemisphere, Continents (Khandas), Oceans (Samudras), Discover, Transport, Plains, Desert, Himalayas, Deccan Plateau, Ghats, Islands, Union and State Governments, Parliament, President, Prime Minister, Courts, etc.

A student of 3rd standard, a eight year old child, who after recognizing alphabet and simple skills in reading and writing in 2nd standard, instead of learning about the concepts behind what he sees and what he hears in his local environment, has to learn about the Solar system, Continents, history of the Early Man and about the Union Government... Then only he starts learning about Andhra Pradesh state, instead of learning what is in his/ her village! Learning unknown topics! By-hearing unknown contents... A local school teacher is expected to explain these unknown things comparing with local examples!

3rd standard children have to recognize and point out the continents, places, etc. on the Globe or in world, country and state Maps! They have to develop abilities to refer the atlas! Is there any atlas in Telugu or in any local language of India which is prepared for 3rd to 5th standard primary school children? Is there any dictionary in Telugu for primary school children? Except the text books prepared and supplied by the State Government, there are no such materials available in the market.

Without providing extra reading and reference material; how any student (particularly SC, ST and BC children, who are still first generation students) will develop grasping abilities with the aid of text books only?

With this background, we developed *District Readers* for primary school children.

We prepared and introduced a reader *Our Village* which covers the basic learning concepts within the village environment, i.e., *Geography of our village, History of our village, Drinking water facility in our village, Irrigation facility in our village, Electricity in our village, Village map, Village market (Santha), Temples in our village, Occupations in our village, Village administration (Village panchayat), Surroundings of our village*, etc. So, children will be familiarised with the new vocabulary of Government text books by using locally used terms by the people.

While teaching “*Our Village*” reader, Nagaraju, a 10 years old child of Srujana school, narrated his village scenes:

“Many people are not educated in my village
Many of them go for labour work
Many go for cattle grazing
They like grazing cattle
In this picture, Seenaiah is grazing buffalos
He is my friend
Now and then he asks me to sit on buffalos
Some times I will get up and sit on buffalos
The front buffalo is Ramanna,
It will allow me to sit on it!”

After this foundation course, children learned *District geography, District history, District resources, District irrigation, Agriculture in the district, Rivers in the district, Industries in the district, Administration of the district (Collector and Zilla Parishad), Important places to see in the district, District Literature, Leaders and leading personalities in the district*, etc. through *District Reader(s)*. By this, children are expected to be aware about their district. And this base will help them to understand about the state, then the country and then about the world from 5th standard onwards; and make easy to understand the prescribed vocabulary in text books!!

I was lucky to work in three different regions of Andhra Pradesh state. I worked in “*Srujana School*”, Pallipadu village of Nellore district which is in coastal area; I worked with “*Paccha Saale*” (*Green School*) of Deccan Development Society of Medak district which is in Telangana area and I worked in my own school “*Chitti Badi*” near Anantapur town of Rayalaseema area. Between 1988 and 1999, I successfully introduced this concept of “district readers” effectively in these three schools. Dialects, customs of these areas are different, but the poverty is same! Untouchability is same! Ignorance and illiteracy are same! I will never forget Mastan, Jungli, Jaya, Vijaya, etc. children of Srujana School; Fatima, Narsimmulu, Raju, etc. children of Paccha Saale and Manjunath, Babu, Siva, Ramanjaneyulu, Sucharita, etc. children of Chitti Badi. I am very thankful to all of them for their kind co-operation in implementing these district readers.

This process simplified and made learning easy from known things to unknown things! This process helped us to produce good results, that means, children passed examinations with minimum marks!! Children were thoroughly aware of their village environment and about their district resources! Learning about district linked them to learn about the information of the state and the world!

Certainly there were good and bad experiences in implementing “district readers” like all other teaching projects. Explaining geographical things like latitudes, longitudes etc., of the district became difficult. But children prepared big *clay models* of globe and identified different countries on them, which helped them to understand a little about geography. Children made *clay collage* work of the district and arranged symbols representing different towns, rivers, projects, crops, etc. And children prepared *paper collage map* of the district with their small drawings. They got tired in map pointing to identify different places in district maps. Though it was hard, it was a joyful learning to explore about our mother earth! They learned very little. But it is very important and greatest value to link themselves with the world... to identify where they are! Learning about mother earth is a beautiful thing!

Srujana School child, 8 year old Malli writes:

“Mother earth!
How you bear trees, hills and us?
How strongly you stood without being crushed?
You give us food and many things
But we offer nothing to others
How we born!....
You always rotate
Why we don’t rotate?
When we die
We also join you and become soil!”

Penna is a common river in Nellore and Anantapur districts. Exploring on river Penna is totally different in both districts. Because of river Penna Nellore district is getting water for both drinking and for farming. But, in

Anantapur Penna is a dried river and not helping the district people in any way. Anantapur district suffers with drought conditions and Nellore district enjoys the big Somasila project! Children’s feelings on river Penna in their poems and monologues reflects the drought conditions of Anantapur district and contamination of the river by the industries in Nellore district. Chitti Badi children made water colour paintings on the drought situation of their villages in Anantapur district. Whereas, it was an emotional experience to Srujana School children (below 11 years) to visit nearby paper industry, meet the workers and management of the factory and request them not to contaminate the waters of the river Penna with industrial waste! It was an exposure to children to demand their right to live! To demand to protect natural resources! Based on these *district readers*, children practically learned lot of things which influence their lives!

Group System as Alternative to Classroom Organization

In 1980s, single teachers used to handle 1-5 classes with more than 100 students in a school. Children sit in rows, one row behind the other. Normally the 5th standard students sit in the front, closest to the teacher and the 1st standard students in the last row. The teacher usually sits on his chair. In terms of teaching, the tradition has been that the teacher takes one class at a time; and the students of that class are made to sit in the front row. The rest of the students sit back, chatting or quarrelling. In this traditional scheme of teaching, there is very little teacher - taught relationship, and much time is consumed in covering and completing the prescribed syllabus for all classes.

For 1st and 2nd standards they have to teach Telugu alphabets; numbers up to 50 or 100 and simple additions and subtractions. Sometimes they teach environmental sciences in general. They have to teach Telugu, Mathematics, Social Studies and Science subjects for 3rd to 5th standard students and English was taught only for 5th standard students. From morning 9.30 to evening 3.30 is it possible to teach so many subjects to

different standard students by a single teacher? Is it possible to improve learning standards of children by a single teacher? Is it possible to control more than 100 students of various standards with various age groups by a single teacher? (Of course where the strength is high, two teachers were appointed at the end of the decade.)

In this situation, many 5th standard children, who go on to 6th standard, enter high school, know only alphabet! They don't know reading and writing of their class text books, so they used to fail in annual examinations. But, because of the state policy, they can be promoted to higher classes!

After careful observation, a novel scheme was introduced in schools of the Rural Development Trust (RDT), which was called the *standard wise group system*. In this system the entire school (comprising five classes) was divided into three groups: **beginners group, average group and above-average group**. The grouping was done on the basis of the standard of a student irrespective of what class he/ she was in. For instance, there were many students in the 4th and 5th standards who were not fully conversant with the alphabets. Children who are not conversant with alphabets in 2nd to 5th standard formed *beginners group*! They will learn alphabets, vowel and consonant syllables! Children of 2nd to 5th standards who know vowel and consonant syllables, but not good in sentence forming, formed *average group*! Children who were good in reading and writing and intelligent were in the third *above-average (advanced) group*!

Conceptually, it is not good. I am sorry to divide children as intelligent, average and dull learners. According to the educationists, every child is intelligent! Because of their family situations, cultural conditioning, societal disparities some are lagging in understanding and grasping things. Children were divided into three groups for our convenience and for their convenience to make them to compete with their actual class room standard as quickly as possible!

But on evaluation, certain drawbacks of this system surfaced. Students of a higher class felt inferior to their juniors when they had to sit in the same group and learn the same stuff. Secondly, it was realized that this system did not help the teacher much in completing the syllabus for all the classes.

Hence, the class wise group system was being followed since 1986 which proved to be better than both the approaches mentioned above.

In this system, the students of each class sit in small circles. Each class from 3rd - 5th standards would be divided into two smaller groups i.e. beginners group and advanced group. Children who do not know reading and writing sit in beginners group and who know reading and writing sit in advanced group. So they were comfortable to sit with their age group children in the same standard!

The teacher attends to a particular class and on completion, moves on to the next class. Sometimes, the teacher also selects a class leader within a group and assigns him to help the lower classes. When the teacher is busy with a particular class, the remaining classes keep themselves busy in reading, writing, memorizing or drawing. The *class wise group system* has thus fostered more class room activity, better organization of students and more teacher - student relationship.

Normally, a teacher teaches one subject for about 45 minute's period. In a day he will take 4 to 5 classes to students. It will be one way teaching i.e., teacher teaches and the student listens! Teacher reads passages from the lesson, explains the meanings and the content with examples for about two or three days and then gives exercises. In one 45 minutes language period he cannot teach all children of 3rd to 5th standards. Neither he takes separate language classes to 3rd to 5th standards... So it is very difficult to complete the annual syllabus of each and every standard! We, as outsiders, pressurise the single teacher to improve the quality of teaching and quality of learning!

If the teacher understands the concept behind these group systems, whether it is *standard wise group system* or *class-wise group system*, it is easy for him and for the children.

Group system encourages *self-learning*! As children sit in circles they help each other; correct themselves; compete with each other to complete and to learn fast. While they discuss words and lessons, there is a chance for everyone to speak, to convey his/ her opinion and if there are spelling mistakes, they correct by joking each other - actually, it is a *participatory*

learning method! In the traditional classroom environment, when they sit in rows, they by-heart questions and answers, and do not help each other to explore something which is the real learning! By conversing with each other slow learners tried their best to pick up within a few months.

Teaching different subjects to different standard children in a short period is highly impossible! Completing syllabus is another difficulty! Controlling children or patiently bearing their quarrels and mischief is a severe test to the teacher!

Group system reduces the work load of the teachers. In the group system, teacher will spend only *10 to 15 minutes* with each group. There is no need to speak loudly; no need to explain entire lesson within a period and no need to put all his strengths to control the children!

We trained teachers to follow “micro teaching method”. Teacher has to identify *a few ‘concepts’* in the lesson; divide the lesson into *small teaching modules*; prepare lesson plan for teaching and prepare ‘*work-cards*’ for children to do different exercises based on that small teaching module! Teacher will select a few important lessons and prepare these micro teaching modules. Other unimportant lessons in textbooks will be covered in a lighter way.

Teacher will select a leader from *average and above-average groups* and train him how to monitor the group to do exercises based on *work-cards*. He will concentrate on *beginners group* children, who need his assistance; quicken their learning abilities to compete with the standard of their age and classes!

Work-cards cover various interesting exercises such as matching; odd one out; blanks; true or false; jumbled words; jigsaw puzzles; drawing pictures; colouring activity; questions and answers; multiple choice questions; etc. For above-average (advanced) group meanings; opposite words; forming own sentences and comprehension, etc. language exercises and working sums in mathematics will be added. Teacher has to work hard to prepare these work-cards according to these groups. In the

teacher’s meeting, on the 1st day of every month teachers used to prepare these work-cards for the entire month.

Teacher will spend 5 to 10 minutes in average/ above-average groups, read a para from the lesson, explain the meaning of it, give work-card and allow the children to practice on their own. Whenever children have doubt, they approach the teacher who is with other group for clarification.

By this group system, children would be busy with work-cards. Though they make comments on each other’s handwriting, spelling mistakes, drawings, the way they do exercises, etc. but, there is no great noise, no huge quarrels, no mischievous behaviour, no escaping nature from the classrooms... Entire school is busy in action to learn reading and writing quickly!

Intelligent children who learn quickly complete their work-card and wander in the school or many a times disturb other groups. So teacher engaged them by providing *additional creative work* like drawing pictures and colouring or writing a poem or a story, etc.

For Social Studies and Science subjects, teachers prepare work-cards based on text books and add few exercises, which ask the children to gather information about the village, villagers and their families; about the history of the village temple; about the panchayat office; draw a village map, etc. Sometimes, they will be asked to interview people of various occupations; interview farmers about crops, soils, etc... This information will be discussed in groups.

One may feel, that it is an idealistic approach! But it is a practical alternative system to classroom organization! We can’t expect every teacher to work with the same wavelength as the trainer, who trains teachers! Among teachers we found, there were above average, and dull teachers! With dull teachers, this system didn’t give good results. But, schools with average and above average teachers showed improvement in quality of education! Many SC, ST and BC children benefitted by this! I thank all those teachers and headmasters who implemented group system and permitted children to be educated!

Slow Learners

In every class there will be children with different psychological standards, i.e. *bright learners* can grasp things by listening once; *average learners* can grasp things by listening twice or thrice; *slow learners* can grasp things after ten times of getting instruction and the fourth category children are extremely *dull*, can't grasp at all!

Teachers do nothing about totally dull children. They need special care and special attention. A single teacher dealing 1 to 5 classes or two teachers dealing 2-3 classes with more number of students, can't pay sufficient attention to improve the academic standard of those dull children.

Traditionally teachers pay more concentration, more concern and more attention to the bright children and try to improve their standard. Sometimes the average children will be lucky to get teacher's attention! And slow learners will be totally neglected by the teacher. Normally more than 50% children will be in this slow learners group in every school!

At home parents don't take sufficient care. Parents' literacy status, their economical status, their professional status and professional relationships, their cultural practices, their beliefs, their relationships with others, their relationship with children... all may influence the slow learners. May be, parents are living in unclean surroundings, may be, parents are quelling with each other, may be they are not encouraging children in their studies and give more importance to work and earning to support their family... making children dull and slow in learning few subjects.

After independence, when SC, ST and BC community children got an opportunity to study. When all text books, the syllabus, the teaching method and the examination system are of the upper caste tradition - how anyone can expect rapid learning among these backward caste students and compete with upper caste students? This may be a cause behind slow learners!

Slow learners may feel boredom to sit in between four walls and learn. Slow learners may be interested in some other faculty like art or music

or some vocational subject, may not be interested in general education. Learning uninteresting subjects is so boring!

Babu, a eight year old boy, studying 3rd standard in government school was a slow learner. Except Telugu alphabets he knew nothing. He joined in Chitti Badi. Very patiently, with all compassion I used to explain different things again and again through play way method and through linking academic learning with arts and crafts. But he was unable to grasp what I was teaching. Many a times I checked myself, whether my teaching is in his language or not. Normally I cook for school children. One day I was not available at the school, and in my absence Babu cooked rice, prepared simple curry and chutney. I came back to the school and tasted the food prepared by him. He informed that he used to help his mother in cooking. He informed me that he can prepare "ragi mudda"; three, four varieties of curries and chutneys. In fact, he was a good eater. I thought, it will be good for him to admit him in any 'catering course (home sciences)'. But for that he needs 10th standard pass certificate. So, he has to study upto 10th standard, then only he can choose the professional/ vocational course of his liking. I explained all this and asked him to complete the 10th standard. But, he failed to learn minimum reading and writing quickly and could not understand his class text book.

Slow learners are big problem to an alternative school teacher. We tried our best, but, in our alternative schools we don't have professional skilled persons to train children in different vocational skills like gardening; cooking; agriculture; horticulture; TV repairing; watch repairing; two-wheeler repairing; motor rewinding; painting; music; dance; etc. If children learn these skills before they complete their 10th standard, they may get a chance to live on their own - whether they pass 10th standard or not.

We tried our best to find alternatives to resolve the issue of slow learning, among them *group system* is one. Another important alternative we tried was "work-card" method! Work-cards play major role in self-learning.

According to the government text book preparing work-card is easy; but it is meaningless. Exercises prescribed by text books are not helpful to develop grasping capacities of students. Government text books and

syllabus suggest developing *knowledge, understanding, skill and application* faculties among the students. But in fact, they give more importance to knowledge part only. Small percentage will be given to other three faculties. Questions are asked in a mechanical way like: "Where was Nehru born? Who are Nehru's parents? Write two names of books written by Nehru?..." Even to test understanding faculty of students they give 'true or false' questions, which are very mechanical, like: "Nehru is a writer... (Yes/ No)"; "Nehru was President of India... (Yes/ No)". There is no chance for the student to think! Though they read lessons many times and memorised questions and answers their minds turn blank during the examination and are unable to write the answers. So some students try to write from other's answer sheet or do malpractices like copying, etc.

We tried our best to create interest among students to learn different subjects easily through work-cards. We normally followed exercises like: matching picture to picture; matching picture to word; matching word to word; matching sentences; fill up the blanks; true or false; odd man out; multiple choice questions; jumbled words/ sentences; cross word puzzles; one word answer questions; questions with short answers; etc.

For example, here is a work-card for 4th and 5th standard students:

"5 lakh SCs are in Anantapur district." For this statement we made different exercises, so that the student has no need to by-heart it mechanically.

1. Multiple choice questions:

These many SCs are in Anantapur district

- a) 3 lakhs
- b) 5 lakhs
- c) 2 lakhs
- d) I don't know

2. True or false:

5 lakh SCs are in Anantapur district.

Yes/ No/ I don't know

3. Matching:

5 lakh SCs are in

Madakasira village

1000 people are in

Anantapur district

4. Blanks:

_____ lakh SCs are in Anantapur district.

or 5 lakh SCs are in _____ district.

5. General questions:

Write 10 lines on your village/ Anantapur district.

Write 10 lines on SCs/ drought/ river Pennar.

6. Here is a story, but not in order. Rewrite the story in order:

1. Ramappa is a SC person.
2. Ramappa saw a bear.
3. Ramappa went to the forest.
4. The bear smelled him and went away.
5. Ramappa slept on the ground like a dead man.

We divided lessons into small teaching modules and teach for 5-10 minutes. After that work-card will be given to students. To avoid by-hearting, all important statements of the lesson (module), will be converted into different exercises! Same statement will be asked as matching exercise, as true or false, as multiple choice and as writing answers... In the beginning it was little bit difficult, but, once children get accustomed to these work-cards, they will take their work-card and start working on their own.

We succeeded in our target. We got good results in raising standards of reading and writing among slow learners. Within three months half of the children of beginner's group got promotion into average group. Half

of the children of average group got promoted into above average group. Remaining half took minimum six months period to improve themselves. A few children took complete one year to get promotion to higher group.... that means, those are dull learners like Babu!

There are very dull students, dull students and slow learners. This is a fact. But, it is my experience that every child is an intelligent child and a creative child. Many of them can pick up. Many of them can compete. Because lack of learning environment, lack of personnel care and lack of encouragement those are backward in learning. If we take care of them by following right teaching methodologies like following group system, small (micro) teaching schedules and work-cards, etc. 50 to 75 percent slow learners can pick up and progress in education!

I am very happy. I am proud. I got a rare opportunity to work for the academic development of SC, ST and BC children. I thank all of them.

raghubabu

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